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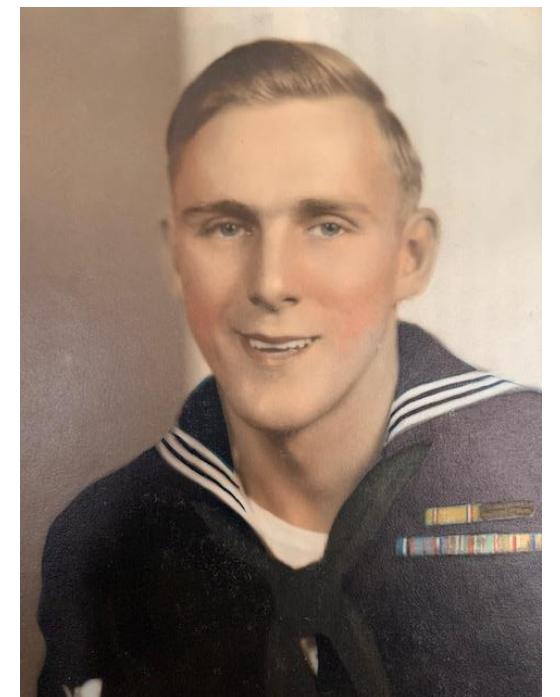
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I NEED TO WRITE NORMA!



A Sailor's
Journal
of WW II
1941 - 1946



I Need to Write Norma! – A Sailor’s Journal of WW II, 1941 - 1946
Copyright © 2021 by Raymond Michael Boettcher
Contact Author for copies: raybopam@bellsouth.net

Raymond Herbert Boettcher would have been 100 years old on December 31, 2021 and Norma Lee (Hewitt) Boettcher would have been 101 on September 16, 2021. They are both greatly missed.

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Book _____ of _____.

Dedication

To my sisters, Sylvia Rae and Jennifer Lee, for challenging the creation of this document. Also, to our sister Mollie Ann, who served our country in the US Navy, and has passed away. The journal was created as a platform to bring all the various sources of information together into one flow of life’s events for Mom and Dad. These include love letters written to Mom, military records of Dad’s time on various ships. Historical records of what was happening in the areas where his ships were engaged, personal records of others on the same ships when Dad was there and above all maintaining facts as they occurred. This is more for everyone to enjoy as it is to relay the experiences of our father during World War II.



Ray is 2nd row from top, 3rd from the right, 1st-2nd grade.

I want to thank Wikipedia for providing photos, information and especially want to thank them for their information on the various movies seen aboard ship during these times. Also, immense thanks to the many government archives available to assist in providing as accurate a picture of the times as they were occurring in 1941 - 1946.

The Boettcher Boys, Charlie (Tallest), William “Bill” (shortest), Ray (blue tie). All three served their country during WW II. This picture was taken early 1929 by a photographer roaming the neighborhood from a horse drawn wagon. This was at their Queen City Avenue home. Their mother was upset since she only had the two ties for the boys to wear and asked the photographer to draw one on Ray. He used a blue pencil. Their father, Valentine, had saved enough money to buy a home at 2136 Turner Street in the summer of 1929. It cost \$4000 in 1929 dollars.



Times were good for the Boettchers. Val was a shipping foreman for a foundry and owned his home in 1930. But the depression saw the foundry close and within 5 years, the home was lost. The family was back renting a home at 121 Dorsey Street for \$20 / month in 1940. Val was a custodian at a bakery, where his daughter worked, making less than \$150/ month.

Everyone needed to help with family expenses.

PREFACE

As one gets closer to seeing the end of their time on Earth, we tend to turn around and look back on our past. Where we've been or where we could have gone if we had made other choices, possibly the 'right' choices. It was this looking back which caused me to run across events of a romance, long before I was a twinkle in my parent's eyes.

The journal was found among a variety of boxes containing various photos, military records, copies of public access records and other personal documents of Ray, in the possession of his family members. His journal is arranged by the dates of events shaping Ray's life upon his enlistment.

Background of the Journal writer: Raymond Herbert Boettcher

Ray entered 1st grade in September 1928 at age 6, he would finish 10th grade in the spring of 1938. Ray transferred to a vocational school to complete his high school requirements and to learn printing skills as a vocation for a job someday. This would mean graduating in the spring of 1940. But this was close to when he joined the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps), on April 2, 1940. So why did he leave school early? There was an "altercation" at the vocational school, basically a fight where Ray was either a participant or an on-looker. The result was his dismissal, preventing him from graduating there. The result was a 22 ½ month credit for education level shown on his enlistment papers and not 24 months for a completed high school diploma! This explains his early entry into the CCC on April 2 before he "would have been", a vocational school graduate in late May!

His monthly pay of \$24 was debited: for room / board, \$2.74, cash amount given directly to him to spend, \$3.26 and the remaining \$18 was sent home to his family for support. Ray was discharged from the Civilian Conservation Corps on September 24, 1940 at Yellow Springs, Ohio after joining on April 2, 1940 at Fort Hayes, Ohio. Service number was 005-316981, he was 5'11", blue eyes, brown hair. He was 18 years old.

Unable to find work as a printing apprentice after the CCC, he worked at Geller Mattress Company in Cincinnati from October 1940 to October 1941, as a machine operator. Ray didn't date much since he had no car and very little money after sharing what he could with the family during the depression. Anna Boettcher, his mother, passed away on December 23, 1940 just before an already difficult Christmas.

Ray joined the Navy on the 13th of October, 1941 after working at the mattress factory for a year. Without a high school diploma, his advancement at the factory would be limited, so he tries the military. His service number was 612 03 27.

And so, begins his Navy career and his journal entries.

10/13/1941: Today, I took the step of enlisting in the Navy and beginning this journal. My brother Charlie was in the Army already and told me the food was better in the Navy. I went for the food, steady work and some travel adventure. The pay was \$21 per month. My recruiting officer was Commander P.M. Gunnell. He gave me a letter saying I have \$113.75 credit, to buy my uniforms when I get to training camp. This was because he didn't have any uniforms at the recruitment station to start me off wearing. He told me to show the uniform disbursement officer the letter and I would get the clothing I needed. My starting rank showed as App. Sea. Which I guess means: Apprentice Seaman.

And boy, does the Navy move fast! I hardly had time to tell the family goodbye before they had me on an evening train to USNTC, Great Lakes in Illinois. It bothers me that, they listed 10th grade as my education level on enlistment papers and ignored my vocational efforts! The train ride has been smooth enough to begin this writing. I hope I can keep it up for the length of my time in the Navy.



10/14/1941: This morning, I reached the training center, Great Lakes, just north of Chicago on a bus. The bus was at the railroad station to meet everyone headed for the training camp upon their arrival by train. There was a large group of new recruits getting off the train. The bus was packed tight.

Before I could spit on the base, they shuffled all of us into a very large room. They lined us up to give us shots and cut off all our hair. I mean ALL my hair, I felt bald! Then I had to strip down to nothing! This is December in upper Illinois and inside a very large room. It was COLD! Everyone was told to put all their stuff: clothes, underwear and any un-needed possessions like jewelry, into a box. We were told to label the box, so it could be shipped back to our home. I was able to keep my small journal hidden under the box as it sat on the floor. Everyone stood there shivering.

I was naked along with a couple hundred other guys until Naval Supply Clerks reached me and tossed uniforms and other gear at me. They piled on my arms uniforms, with little attention to my size, and just said I would learn to wear it properly. They gave me 'sleeping' gear. This was a hammock with a mattress and two mattress covers, which I heard others calling them 'fart sacks'! Also, I got one pillow, two pillow covers, and two blankets. Hey, this was more than I had back home!

Now I'm told, I will learn how to fit it all into my 'Sea Bag'. This round canvas sack was only 26" x 36" with grommets on top. I had to weave a draw string through the grommets to close the bag and someday hang on my bed, sorry my rack. There are no racks anywhere in this big room.

Already a long day, we were told we would be sleeping tonight where we stood, on the floor of this large room. We had chow and it wasn't bad. Charlie was right, so far, about the food. Now, I am writing this as I sit on my mattress over a pile of all my gear, before they turn out the lights. It is about 9 PM.

10/15/1941: Today, we were awakened at 5:30 AM. I am told I had to stencil my name on everything I was just given. I must learn the proper way to stow all of it in this bag. I watched the others and quickly learned my sleep gear and mattress were put inside the hammock. The hammock is then wrapped around the seabag, after the seabag is filled. Boy, not having to get the mattress into the bag was a relief!

But then I learned there were regulations on how the rest of your gear was to be placed in your seabag! Things were rolled in a certain grouping, each roll tied, and each roll was place in the seabag in a certain order. I was told this saved space, helped prevent wrinkles and ensured all my stuff fit! And for our nighttime reading, everyone got 'THE' bible: The Bluejackets' Manual! Read it and memorize it all by morning, I was told. Wow, and this is only the second day! I am stopping this entry so I can start on the manual!

10/16/1941: I'm glad I did some reading of the 'bible' last night! This book tells me everything I would need to know to become a sailor and handle myself like a sailor at future stations, either ashore or afloat. I also learned my designation is a 'Boot' until I complete basic, hence "Boot Camp".

The planned 'Training Program' in camp was to help me learn such wonderful phrases as: 'Up and at em', 'drop em' and 'grab em', how to react during a fire drill, what scrub down that deck means, learning about inspections, 'move it Boot'- **Now**, and the famous, 'I ain't your momma asking you'; It's **me! I'm telling you!** At least today, they marched us to a more permanent home with racks. If you can call a single-bedroom unit that can sleep 100 guys at a time, a home!

10/17/1941: Today, was the beginning of what they call, getting me in Navy shape. All day they had me running, calisthenics and more running. They also took time to show us how to scrub our clothes and eat Navy food! After all the exercise, I probably would eat anything that didn't smell bad and sometimes it did smell bad.



GLTC's barrack's unit; rolled out sea bags and awaiting inspection

10/22/1941: I know it's been almost a week since I have put anything in this book, but not much has changed. Still running, doing pushups, jumping 'boot' (you slap your hands over your head while spreading your feet apart as you jump), sit-ups and more running.

At least, one change was when we run in the afternoon sun. They have us hold a rifle over our head as we run. I also learned the creed by heart!



Sailor's Creed

I am a United States Sailor.

I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America and I will obey the orders of those appointed over me. I represent the fighting spirit of the Navy and those who have gone before me to defend freedom and democracy around the world.

I proudly serve my country's Navy combat team with Honor, Courage and Commitment.

I am committed to excellence and the fair treatment of all.

10/24/1941: Well, another week, that's two down and four to go! Today, I was very tired, because we were all awoken, I guess about 2 – 3 in the morning with the instructor yelling: 'Up and at em', 'move it Boot'- **Now**, and the 'I ain't your momma asking you', It's **me! I'm telling you!** This was a friendly reminder of the phrases we are to understand fully.

They helped us to learn how to function with little sleep. I'm told to be thankful, and to respond to disagreeable orders, immediately and without hesitation. 'Discipline Training' I think they called it. I call it 'letting the Chief Petty Officer get his kicks' at our expense!

10/31/1941: I have now survived the half-way mark and I think our company is performing swell. We have learned to march together as a group, dress like a sailor and act like a proper sailor. I did find some fellows I could exchange some of the clothing thrown at me the first day, that was either too big or too small (like the underwear). Also, I have learned how to properly pack my seabag according to the 'bible' and have it pass inspection.

Yesterday, we had to pack our seabag, hammock and mattress included, so we could carry our seabag on our morning run. Yeah.



11/07/1941: I guess I have failed to include in my journal something about this place. WELL - This is a **big place**! I'm told this is the Navy's best boot camp. It's the largest military installation in Illinois! The base is like a small city with its own fire department, Naval Security Forces (Police), and public works department.

The parade field, where I hope to graduate in 2 weeks, is in front of an earlier 1911 building which has a huge clock-tower! You can see it from anywhere on the base!



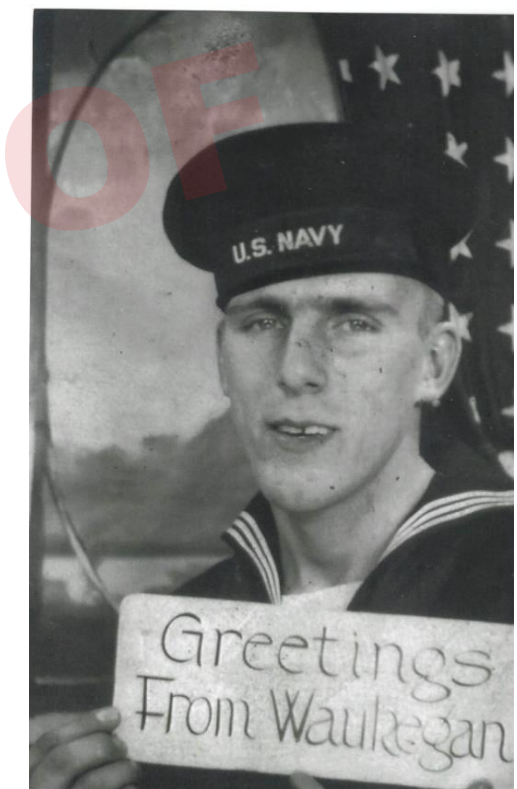
They say this camp was closed back on July 1, 1933 and placed in a maintenance status! It was re-opened on July 1, 1935 because of the lobbying by local businessmen and the Congressional Delegation from Illinois. I bet they're glad they re-opened it, considering what's happening in Europe!















Ray's first Photo as a 'Boot' in his Navy Uniform

11/14/1941: I have learned the various insignias we have in the Navy 'bible. I saw that being a 'Boot' seaman, I would have no insignia. - - Yet! As I do more exercising and training and exercising, I will progress in my rating.

They say this is a warm winter, thus far. With the temperature in the mid-50s, it would be a nice, warm day back home for this time of year. But the wind here is constant and all day long.

So, I have learned quickly how to put on my cap, known as my Dixie Cup, to keep it from blowing away!



													
United States	Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy	Fleet force master chief petty officer	Command master chief petty officer	Master chief petty officer	Command senior chief petty officer	Senior chief petty officer	Chief petty officer	Petty officer first class	Petty officer second class	Petty officer third class	Seaman	Seaman apprentice	Seaman recruit, 'boot'
													No insignia

11/21/1941: Well, I guess you can count on the Navy to change plans on you. I understood my first week of basic began when I got here. They said none of us qualified as 'Boot' until Monday, October 20th! Then they reminded all of us that Thanksgiving would push our training into the following week! This pushes the graduation parade happening on Monday, December 8th, depending on the weather. After all, they did not want the graduation's Honorary Speaker to be standing in 10 feet of snow! Of course, 'boots' were not a concern regarding the weather affecting them.

11/28/1941: What a Thanksgiving meal! Wow, it was swell! All the food and desert a man could want! Not has good as the sisters would cook. But plenty of it, even with a hundred boots eating alongside me.

Weather still nice and we had time to play some basketball in the gym to work off the fat! Nice to have some time to myself in the evening. I will write the family about the great meal I had.

A Holiday weekend visit to Chicago (Ray on right).



12/01/1041: Today, it was a messy Monday. It rained heavily and we ran in the mud anyway. All afternoon, I scrubbed my clothes and hung them to dry. I seem to do this scrubbing a lot, since I only have a few pair to wear and no money yet to buy extra.

12/05/1941: Our Company's Chief gave us the afternoon to ourselves since Monday we will be graduating from being a Boot to being a Sailor! Rumor is that after graduating, we will be given liberty for a week or two. Of course, this is depending on where we are to be transferred, a ship or some specialized schooling. I am hoping for a ship assignment!



12/5/1941: Picture (on left) of Ray (Center, standing) and four guys (Carl F Warnock, John A. Hall (standing), Chuck Feltham, and Charles A. Jacobs(kneeling)) all graduating together. It is a picture of Ray with his fellow Great Lakes Training Camp Graduates. The buildings in the background are an indication that the picture is taken on campus at GLTC in Illinois.

(Picture on right) Another Graduate of Great Lakes Training Camp was Joseph Beskid. He would serve on three different ships with Ray. Joe had just turned 17 years old on September 26, 1941. Sometimes he would be called 'Biscuit'.

Yet even the promised two-week liberty after graduation, would still have me back here before the Christmas holidays or going directly to my new assignment. Hopefully, my sister Till, will bake some holiday cookies early for me when I arrive home next week.

12/07/1941: At noon we got news about Pearl Harbor being attacked by Japanese airplanes. Don't know how many killed or how bad the damage, but anyone who's an officer is scurrying around from one building to another. It's warm again today, maybe 40s but us 'Boots' are realizing we are likely in a war now! All the training now seems to have more meaning for us.

Buses were going out to get returning sailors from their October graduation liberty. We are sure our graduation will be canceled or delayed. A lot of guys were gathering over at the building where the Chaplin has services regularly. Even some guys I thought were not church types!

Wow! How my world has suddenly turned over. When I stop writing, I am going to see if I can call home, to see where Charlie might be stationed now. I hope he is okay.



On December 7, 1941, Japan launched an unprecedented attack over the Hawaiian island of Oahu. Their main target: the U.S. Naval fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor. USS Oklahoma was the only battleship that capsized - taking hundreds of men with her.

12/08/1941: Today was mostly waiting around for what's next.

This morning, at 1130 hour, we listened on the radio to President Roosevelt's speech. He made our entry into the fight 'official' with Congress voting a declaration of war against Japan. There was no graduation parade and no liberty given out. I, all of us, just wanted to know where the Navy wanted us to go next, to defend our country.

12/09/1941: My Chief told me; I would know by Friday where they are transferring me. I am hoping for a battleship with lots of guns to shoot at Japan. I am not in a mood to write much, but hopefully, I will have plenty to say very soon.

12/12/1941: Well, they are sending me someplace warm and has lots of gunships!

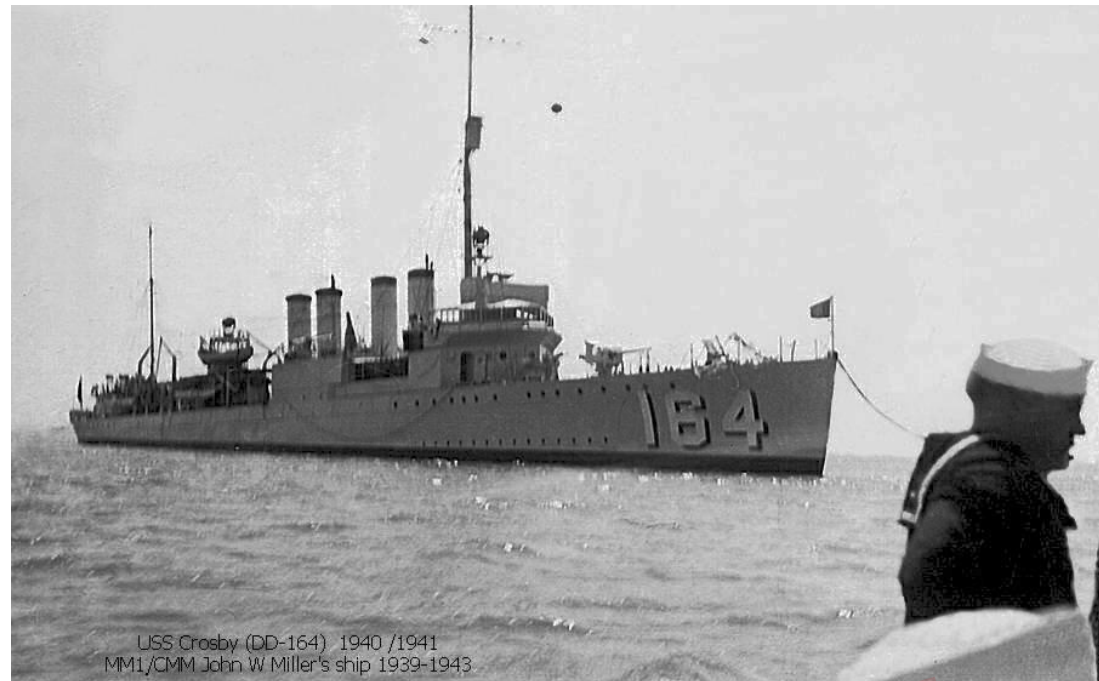
I am headed to US DESBASE (Destroyer Base) in San Diego, California. I have never been west of the Mississippi River! They gave me train vouchers.

My seabag is packed properly, of course, and I am on the way there!



12/15/1941: I arrived at the base today and was shown my rack location. I met my new Chief. He will form the training company to be attached to a destroyer. They called me a 'Transfer recruit' on my papers but my rating is still A.S. (apprentice seaman).

12/16/1941: At this base is stationed the destroyer, *USS Crosby DD-164*, on which the company will do its training. I learned the ship was built in 1918 and decommissioned in 1922. But for some reason, maybe for training new sailors, it was re-commissioned in 1939. It is known as a "Wickes-class" destroyer.



USS Crosby (DD-164)

Currently, the ship runs a patrol in the 11th Naval District Defense Forces. Also, the ship provides services to the Destroyer Base, San Diego for the training of destroyer crews. Her normal operating crew is 8 officers and 98 enlisted men. But it can carry up to an additional 150 or more trainees. There are 4 boats stowed aboard and used to go ashore. But the guns, wow! This ship has three 3" guns, three 40 mm and five 20 mm guns. Also, it has four depth charge projectors and 21" torpedo tubes for sub killing!

12/17/1941: With Christmas a week away, I thought we would train on the ship when docked, while living on base. Instead, we packed our seabag with hammock and everything we had and boarded the *USS Crosby*. After stowing our gear in a locker, we were told the emergency regulations on this ship.

They trained us on what to do when the 'General Alarm', 'Fire' alarm, 'Collision' alarm, 'Abandon Ship' alarm and the 'Man Overboard' alarm sounded. Then, we headed out to sea. One important point was the General Alarm will never be used for drills. Instead, 4-5 strokes on the Chemical (gas) alarm will be used and word will be passed as to what situation is being staged. It is nice to know difference between real events and drill situations.

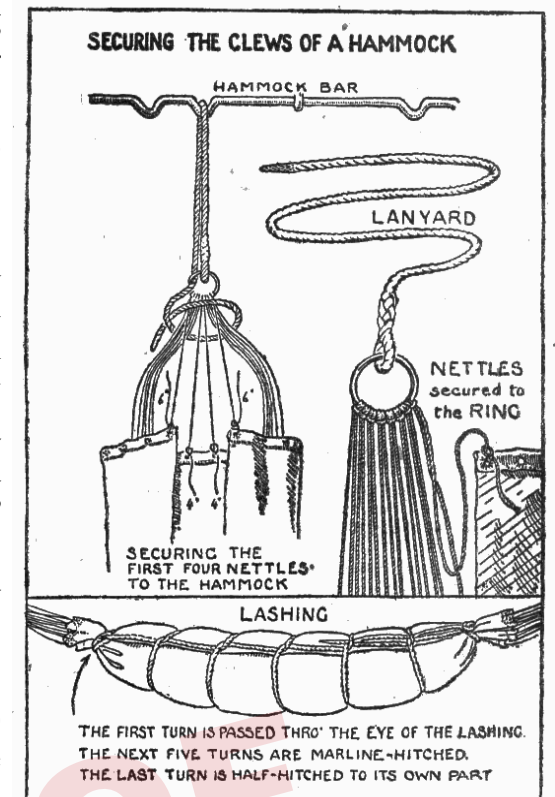
12/18/1941: Today, I learn the slang used on board this 'Tin Can' or destroyer. Serving on this ship made me a 'Tin Can Sailor'. At least, this sounds better than my basic camp title of 'Boot'. Also, the term 'Scuttlebutt' means water fountain from an old phrase for wooden cask. This would be where fresh water was drawn from the hole on its side. Of course, any gossip heard from someone taking a long slow drink saying "We're headed to . . . and I heard it from the cook!" was quickly passed around the ship. This is known as scuttlebutt. So, I now know where rumors start on a ship.

I was also given instruction on how to properly attach my hammock to the bar and lash it when it is not occupied. There would be many inspections.

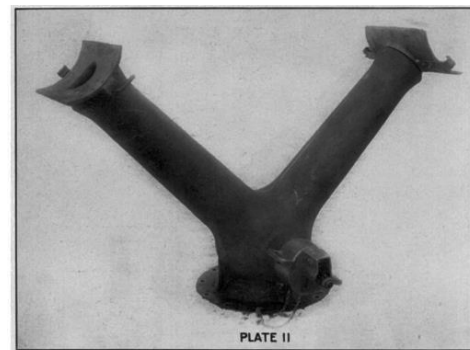
Due to preserving as much fresh water as possible, especially with all the trainees on board, I was told all showers would be 'Navy showers'. The process is: 'wet down, turn off the water, soap up and then, turn the shower on to rinse off quickly'.

12/19/1941: As part of the 'crew', I was to participate in sea watches or 'standing watch'! The importance of a 'watch duty' is for a quick emergency response to any situation. The safe operation of the ship was intensely stressed to me. Personnel would be located from stem to stern. Even down in the engine room there would be a qualified person on watch. The watches are 4 hours and trainees would begin during daylight hours so senior crew members would be awake to assist with any problems. I guess they don't trust us to stay awake at night!

12/20/1941: Today, they divided us up for more individual training. I was placed on the Depth Charge Projector! This weapon is the most effective at attacking submerged subs. All we do is pass over where we last saw the sub and drop these explosives on top of them, hopefully to blow close to them.



We set off several rounds for practice and I had a swell time doing it!



PROJECTOR ASSEMBLED WITH ARBORS, BUT WITHOUT DEPTH CHARGES.



PROJECTOR FIRED WITH DUMMY DEPTH CHARGES.

This projector is a 'Y' shooter. It sits on the deck and shoots a depth charge over each side of the ship at the same time.

12/21/1941: Today is Sunday and the weather is nice onboard. Normally, we are to wake at the 0530 hour every day, except those coming off watch. All hammocks are to be lashed up by 0630. Breakfast is at 0645. We are told the uniform of the day, drills to be conducted, work orders to perform and hear of any sick call, at 0800. At 1145, we gather for dinner, then return to scheduled work until 1630 hours. At 1645, supper and sometimes a movie picture at 1930 hours. Otherwise, I am on my time until 2105 when lights are out!

But on Sunday, we get to sleep until 0630, muster is 0815 and work details stop at 0945. The rest of the day is your own! Which for me was standing the 1600 to 2000 watch on the port side rail, mid-ship. I heard the trainee they put on the bow for watch duty, was given the added job of 'Mail Buoy Watch'. He was handed a boat hook to snag the buoy which would have the ship's incoming mail.

12/22/1941: Today, I was placed on the torpedo firing crew. This was a very complex firing system with a 'Torpedo Officer in charge' and a 'Director' Trainer. The 'Director' was a mechanical device where the torpedo speed, target speed and other information are entered. Then the tube personnel, where I was placed, set the torpedo's speed and angle prior to firing. This was more difficult than shooting off depth charges.

12/23/1941: Today, I was on cleaning duty. Lockers where we stowed are gear are made of aluminum. They were cleaned with Bon Ami only, since they could be easily scratched. This maintains their good appearance. Never use lye or abrasive cleaners on aluminum. Now, I am trained to be a good maid after the war.!

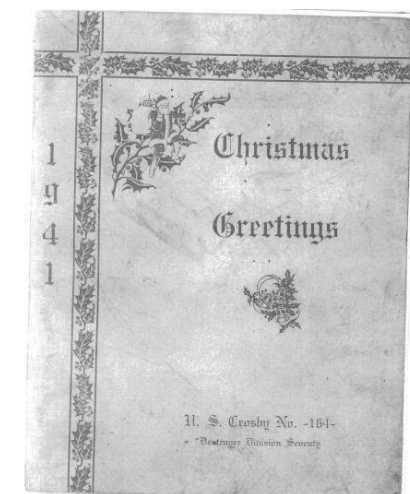
After lunch, I learned the berths on board were also made of aluminum and I cleaned a number of these. By supper, I smelled like Bon Ami and skipped my 'Navy' shower for the night. I took a long moment for remembering my Mom. It has been a year since she passed away.

12/24/1941: Christmas Eve! I stood watch again in the same spot mid-ship, but on the 0400 to 0800 slot. I did learn there is no such thing as a 'Mail Buoy'. It was a practical joke by the regular crew, on a trainee. I'm told we don't get mail when we are at sea. Today, was also inspection day for all berthing, messing, food stowage spaces, and any area where food is prepared. Attention was given to sanitation. This made our dinner delayed, but hopefully tomorrow's Christmas Dinner will be edible.

12/25/1941: Christmas! At 0100, the fire alarm sounded. It is the general alarm followed by ship's bell, ringing rapidly. Then the location of the fire is given by 1-stroke forward, 2-stroke amidship and 3-stroke aft. We are to man our 'general quarters' station, until informed otherwise. A red object was seen flying across the Bridge. We then heard the situation was secured and told to return to our hammocks.

At 0300, we were again awoken by hearing the ship's bell ringing rapidly and received word of a man overboard. We were underway, so the ship needed to maneuver around to reach the man. No boats are permitted to be lowered until the man is located. Operating the searchlights to locate the man, we then threw a lifebuoy (a big floating donut really) to him. When we did see the man in the water, he was dressed in red, had a long white beard and appeared to be a lifeless, stuffed, old raft! The regular crew had a good laugh and let us trainees return to our hammocks.

Still at sea and still, as scheduled, comes the 0645-holiday schedule reverie! Being at sea, there was no mail or gift packages from back home. This made the day a little sad, but we are told, war doesn't take a holiday. We did finish work at 0945, as today's schedule was the same as Sundays. So, I took the opportunity to sleep, sleep and sleep!



Anchors Aweigh (1906 version)

Stand Navy out to sea, Fight our Battle Cry; We'll never change our course, So vicious foe steer shy-y-y-y. Roll out the TNT, Anchors Aweigh. Sail on to Victory And sink their bones to Davy Jones, Hooray!	Through our last night on shore, Drink to the foam, Until we meet once more. Here's wishing you a happy voyage home. Blue of the Mighty Deep; Gold of God's Sun Let these colors be till all of time be done, done, done, On seven seas we learn Navy's stern call: Faith, Courage, Service true, with Honor, Over Honor, Over All.
Anchors Aweigh, my boys, Anchors Aweigh. Farewell to foreign shores, We sail at break of day-ay-ay-ay.	

1/02/1942: Yesterday was nice due to having the holiday schedule, which gave us the afternoon to ourselves. I took the liberty to sleep, sleep and play some basketball on the deck. But earlier, I was back to the 3" gun for barrel cleaning, lubrication and rust scraping.

1/09/1942: I am regularly training on the various jobs of the 3" gun and their different locations around the ship (there are 3 on board). The routines of gun cleaning, airing your bedding, running various emergency drills continued as well. I did stand my regular watch schedule of the 0400 – 0800 Wednesday and the 1600- 2000 Sunday.

1/16/1942: I was told we are heading back to base in San Diego, California. Not sure if this rumor is another 'scuttlebutt' joke by the crew or if it is true. I will believe it when I see land! It will be nice to see if my family has written some letters. Marie always wrote Charlie, so I hope she writes to me as well.

1/17/1942: The ship docked during the night. As I stepped onto the dock, with everything I took aboard in my seabag, an officer was calling out my name. He handed me new orders.

He was handing new orders out to just about every trainee leaving the ship. I am being transferred, still with my A.S. rating, to the Armed Guard Center (Pacific), Treasure Island Section Base in San Francisco, California. The instructions said, transportation leaves at 0830 and bring your seabag.

I saw Joe Beskid was being sent to the Armed Guard Center as well! I have no idea what an 'Armed Guard' might be. I surely was not looking forward to being in a 'Military Police' type unit!

1/18/1942: I reported at the given destination today. I was told this naval service was defending Merchant ships. Also, this duty was virtually suicidal. At this time, German submarines were devastating Atlantic shipping. I now felt the war was upon me. I also have figured out just how dangerous Armed Guard duty was going to be.

I was informed that the lack of adequate 'automatic, ship-mounted' weapons was **"the most serious weakness in the readiness of the navy for war."** And therefore, there were even fewer guys qualified, who could give us instruction in gunnery at anti-aircraft training centers (AATCs). Now, I am turning into a serious guy!

Editor's Note of Fact: Only a few people outside of the military were trained in gunnery beginning in the spring of 1941, due to the Neutrality Act, which prevented arming merchant ships. The military training programs were inadequate in providing the numbers of men needed. Little progress was made until practically all authority was centered in the "Arming Merchant Ship" Section in the Fleet Maintenance Division of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations on January 31, 1942.

1/19/1942: Immediately, I learned my work with the 3" guns on the **USS Crosby** generated my invitation to the newly expanded Naval Armed Guard.

1/23/1942: Wow, the Navy moves fast! After just a week of refreshing my skills on the 3" guns, I was placed aboard a liberty ship, a merchant ship or more simply a cargo ship.

1/24/1942: I was transferred to the **SS Meriwether Lewis**. This ship was just launched in October, 1941 out of Portland, Oregon. All she had was **one 4"** 50 Mark IX gun on her stern.

This 4" gun was the one replaced on the **USS Crosby** as being old and outdated. Not much protection in my opinion, especially against subs and aircraft!

And my buddy from the **USS Crosby**, Joe Beskid, was also assigned aboard the **SS Meriwether Lewis**! At least, I will know someone aboard ship when it gets sunk!



Portland Mayor Earl Riley and guests at the launching of SS Meriwether Lewis, October 19, 1941

1/30/1942: We spent most of the week learning the ship's emergency alarm system of sounds, work detail schedule, watch detail schedule, tour of the ship and our rack / locker location. What was new for us 'Armed Guard' guys was, we were not actually part of the crew for running the ship. We will spend most of our time disassembling, cleaning and reassembling the one 4" gun. We did take on ammunition and stowed it away while in port at San Francisco.

2/13/1942: I was officially advanced in rating from A.S. to Sea2c. Now, I feel like a real sailor! I was told of the change in mid-January but happy it is now in writing. Still, I am just maintaining the one gun and practicing the various drills! Over and over!

2/14/1942: Today, the *SS Meriwether Lewis* completed its move up the west coast to perform test firing of our 4" 50 Mark IX gun outside of Portland, Oregon.



Coxswain, Louis Hoegsted, on the SS Meriwether Lewis is working on the 4" gun on the poop deck

When we had fired the gun for several rounds, we noticed the mount shifted badly during the test firings. Our detachment's commander, Ensign Knell showed us how we could correct the problem but reported the problem to command as well.



Armed Guard crew of the SS Meriwether Lewis, early 1942, Ray is front Row left with Bill Blackwell, Bill Bowman and Wayne Fink. Louis Hoegsted, coxswain, middle row on left with 'Curly' Ramsey next to him, then John Bolton and Oren Bower. Top row Left to right is Guy Billman, Henry Ross French, Joseph Fezell then Joe 'Biscuit' Beskid, far right.

2/17/1942: We docked at San Francisco to take on fuel, supplies and shells for the 4" gun. Also, we loaded some cargo to take to Brisbane. I asked Louis where Brisbane was located. When he said 'Australia', we all knew we were going to Asia, closer to the war action. And us with one gun. The talk about the Armed Guard being a suicide assignment was right.

We watched as crated jeeps and army trucks were loaded. There were crates upon crates of rifle ammunition. There were banded barrels labeled gasoline and aviation fuel. There were even more crates labeled army supplies from what I could read. Yes, the war is getting close to me. What a fast five months it has been.

2/20/1942: We are moving out to open sea today. Ensign Knell grouped us together to maintain our morale. He said there is no escort for us because there were not enough to go around for all the supply ships. Most are in the Atlantic. We are traveling independently, which will make us harder for the enemy to find. The only question raised was how long to Brisbane. Ensign Knell said about a month. Then he dismissed us. This journal is going to fill up fast at this rate.

2/24/1942: Joe caught Louis writing a letter home. Louis was kind enough to tell Biscuit, it was a letter to his wife back home. Today was their 2nd anniversary.

John Bolton heard what Joe was telling me. He suggested we get muffin from the mess and take it to Louis as a celebration. Since we had no candles, Bill suggested we stick a cigarette in it and light it. We all took it to Louis, who was thankful even though he didn't smoke. We sat drinking coffee, listening to Louis talk about his wife and past life. Seems he had already done four years in the Navy before getting married. He was a carpenter and truck driver when he re-enlisted. He hoped he made a wise decision.

3/05/1942: Life is starting to get somewhat boring. We do the same drills, same exercises and same cleanings, every day. I do seem to spend too much time washing my clothes as well. But we are happy to stand our watch when no other ships are sighted.

3/06/1942: I have learned tomorrow there will be a party hosted by the Ensign and our coxswain. Seems we will be crossing the Equator. I am told those who crossing for the first time, will need to be in attendance at the court of King Neptune. I am concerned how those who have passed this ritual, simply look at us newbies and smiled in a creepy way. Maybe the party is not fun for everyone.

3/07/1942: Today was party day. I am told I am a 'Wog'. Those who have crossed the Equator before are called 'Shellbacks'. The party first proceeds with most of the Armed Guard crew knelling before King Neptune (our Ensign). Then we are given the 'Devil's Tongue'. This was done by putting hot sauce mixed with an oily substance similar to cod liver oil I was given as a child. You were not allowed to spit it out but had to swallow it. As I write this activity in my journal, my stomach is still in a rumble of gas explosions.

Next, there was a beauty contest where the 'Wogs' had to prance around in front of the King in a grass skirt. There was only one skirt, so we had to pass it around to each of us. Yes, I did my dancing as well as everyone else. I think Oren was the winner.



Oren and Wayne, dressed for King Neptune's Beauty Contest, March 1942

We were told at sunset; we are now all 'Shellbacks'.

3/08/1942: I was sitting in the mess having coffee while I write in my journal about how my stomach still makes a lot of gas. I have not eaten much today. Joe and Wayne came in laughing and asked what the day was. I said March 8, 1942. They laughed again. They said today was March 9th. Wayne explained it was like time zones back home. When you go west you gain an hour.

On the ocean you gain a day. Thankfully, Louis walked in for some coffee. He said they were correct. Normally, Louis would not play tricks on his men. Afterall, he was the coxswain responsible for our training and education as U.S. sailors. I am beginning to doubt him on this magic day change.

3/13/1942: It is Friday the thirteen by ship's time. Seems everyone but me have accepted easily this change in the date. I will try to stay with ship's time and date. Our luck continues to be good, so I am ignoring any thoughts of 'bad luck'. Our trip remains boring but safe. The one gun we have is well cleaned. It operates smoothly. We have used some ammo for practice shooting but wanted to conserve most of it in case of enemy contact. I hope for more boring events ahead. The latest scuttlebutt is we are about ten to fourteen days out of Brisbane.

3/22/1942: The ship's radio guy would sometimes pickup news from passing ships, if they are on the air 'wave'. The ship's captain received orders, as we are passing New Zealand, to divert to Wellington Harbor. The Ensign confirmed the orders. We are going into New Zealand, not Brisbane.

3/23/1942: We docked next to the *SS William Clark*, the first liberty ship to dock at Wellington. They beat us by just five days. They immediately began unloading the cargo of military equipment and supplies. I learned there are a lot of American troops already on the island.

We heard officially today that General MacArthur had departed Luzon and the Japanese control the Philippines. He is Melbourne now. We did hear about General MacArthur making a promise to return to the Philippines! They have started calling it, his 'I shall return' speech. I do hope he keeps that promise and run those Japs back home.

3/24/1942: The ensign allowed us to go ashore if we stayed in the dock area. It was nice to stretch our legs on solid, stable ground. I bought some cheese at a stand to see what Asian cheese tasted like. It was very good. I got a funny looking coin in my change called a shilling. I will save it to send home to my sister, Marie.



3/25/1942: They only unloaded about half the cargo. Seems the rest is going to another island named Caledonia, not to Brisbane. They also loaded some preserved meat crates for the same destination. I wonder how far it is to Caledonia. They spoke English here in New Zealand but they said it with a funny sound. I am thankful I could understand it when I bought the cheese.

3/29/1942: I stood the 2000 – 2400 watch so I was allowed to sleep later. I did wake up at 0800 because I did not want to miss breakfast. The watch was a calm evening, I did see lots of ships going many different directions. I guess, hopefully, we are traveling in a safe area. Although it was Sunday, we spent the day on drills. Mostly going to battle stations and being in the ready position,

4/01/1942: It is April Fool's Day. I need to be on guard with these jokesters around here. When I was a kid, I remember Frank put a sign on my back saying 'kick me'. It didn't take long to know what he did but I still had a sore butt. We are sitting in Noumea Bay waiting for a dock space. This port is not very well equipped to unload many ships from what I can see. Joe told me the Ensign will not let us go ashore unless you can speak French. My guess is Joe is trying to 'fool' me.

We found a pier to dock the ship, just after chow. I learned from Louis, New Caledonia is a French colony, so they probably do speak French. So much for going ashore.

4/02/1942: The unloading is going very slow because many of the crates are too heavy for their cranes. The crates have to be partially broken down to make them lighter. This takes time. Louis said the Ensign is allowing us to go ashore as long as we stay to the shore and beaches. Stay away from the hills and mountains. I told Louis I don't speak French and I don't know anyone in the group who did. Louis laughed. He said these islands are so close to New Zealand and Australia, who do speak English, that they can understand most of what you say. I saw Joe grin.

I took my unauthorized camera to get some pictures of the place. Wayne, Bill, Guy and myself went off by ourselves following the shoreline around to the right of the bay. I found a very interesting colorful shell in the sand as we walked. We walked through a grove of banana trees. Wayne said they are not bananas but plantains. Still looked like a banana to me.



Guy Billman (left), Wayne Fink with a bunch of Plantains, not Bananas, New Caledonia, April 1942.

We continued walking and found a village of grass huts. The people seemed very nice. Some kids offered us a ride on their horses for an American nickel. Wayne decided to give it try.



Group of Kids who would give rides to sailors for money, New Caledonia, April 1942



Wayne on horseback, New Caledonia, April 1942

It wasn't long before we sighted a gun emplacement. Upon climbing up a hill, we found an airstrip there. We were quickly met by some soldiers of the island defense group. I am glad they understood we were on the same side. They even allowed a picture of their group. Again, Wayne had to be in the picture.



Wane Fink (standing) and Bill Bowman posing with Caledonian soldiers manning coastal defenses including six-inch artillery guns for the nearby airstrip.

By dark we were back on-board ship. I had traded a pocket knife I had for some local coins, only to find out the coins were French.



4/03/1942: They got everything unloaded including the fuel barrels and the meat. We have pulled away from the dock but are sitting in the bay. The scuttlebutt is we are waiting for another dock location to take on Nickel ore.

4/05/1942: I was surprised when I was told, today is Easter. With the war going on, I don't think much about holidays. If I was home, there would be a big meal with good sausage and sauerkraut. Here we had ham sandwiches and all the coffee I could drink.

We are now loaded and moving out of the bay on our way to Brisbane, Australia. I understand they speak English there.

4/10/1942: It was a short trip to Brisbane but we will be sitting in the bay awaiting a spot to unload. This harbor is full of ships. Standing at the bow, things were happening everywhere I looked.

Joe almost got me in trouble with our commander, Ensign Knell. Joe slipped up and mentioned someone having a camera onboard. Quickly, he reversed course and said he 'wished' someone had a camera on board. Cameras are forbidden to have on the ship.

I am constantly needing to find new hiding places for it. I think the Ensign knows I have one and is okay with it, if I don't show it around in plain sight.

4/12/1942: The ensign said we will not be getting shore liberty here in Australia as we need to be moving out of dock space as soon as the unloading is done. I asked one of the merchant crewmen if he could get me some Australian money. I would trade him some of my stationery and a pencil so he could write letters home.

He brought me a couple of shillings for my collection of Asian coins. I was appreciative. I was told it was a ram on the back of the coin. Funny looking ram if you ask me.



4/15/1942: After unloading the Nickel ore, we moved to a pier where we were loaded with some mining equipment. But it was only in one hold. We moved to another dock where sand was loaded in the remaining holds but not full up. Louis told us the sand was for ballast to give the ship stability during ocean travel. I asked where we were going. The reply was; 'back across the Pacific'. I am glad we are headed home.

4/17/1942: Friday again. We have cleared the harbor area, heading for open water. I am happy to have seen Asia but I am also glad to be going back to the states.

I did learn some members of our Armed Guard group lied about their age. Now, I know why they think I am their mentor on things. Joe says he was only 17 and two others in the group said they were 15 and 16. I hardly believe any are that young. If you are a big kid, like Joe and look 2-3 years older, then you can likely join up. I come by my mature looks naturally! But if anyone calls me 'Pops', I'll pop them alright, hard in the head!

4/24/1942: If it's Friday, we have been to sea for a week now. We crossed that magical line again and I lost a day. I do not know if we have been out at sea a week or eight days. Or maybe only six days. Who knows? But ship time is April 24th, I was told.

Cleaning guns, eating 3 meals a day, washing clothes, running drills and doing all of it again, is all I have been doing since Brisbane! It has begun to seem like standing watch is the most enjoyable part of the week! Especially the night watches. With the stars and moon shining off the waves of the ocean.

At least, they have been peaceful so far. No enemy vessels seen.

5/01/1942: Another Friday, BUT there has been a change! The month is now MAY! Joe said the scuttlebutt is we are going to South America not North America. Makes sense from my looking at the night sky on watches. It seemed we were moving very much easternly.

5/08/1942: Another Friday that has been very peaceful. We are travelling alone with no other ships. I haven't even seen any ships on watch. I hope we don't fall off the edge of the Earth. I might get missed back home.

5/15/1942: It's Friday. I have learned we are going to Chile. We should be there within a week to ten days. Louis said they speak Spanish there. I guess I will need to ask the merchant crewman if he can get me some of their coins for my collection. Since I don't speak Spanish, I am not planning to go ashore. I need to think of what I could trade him.

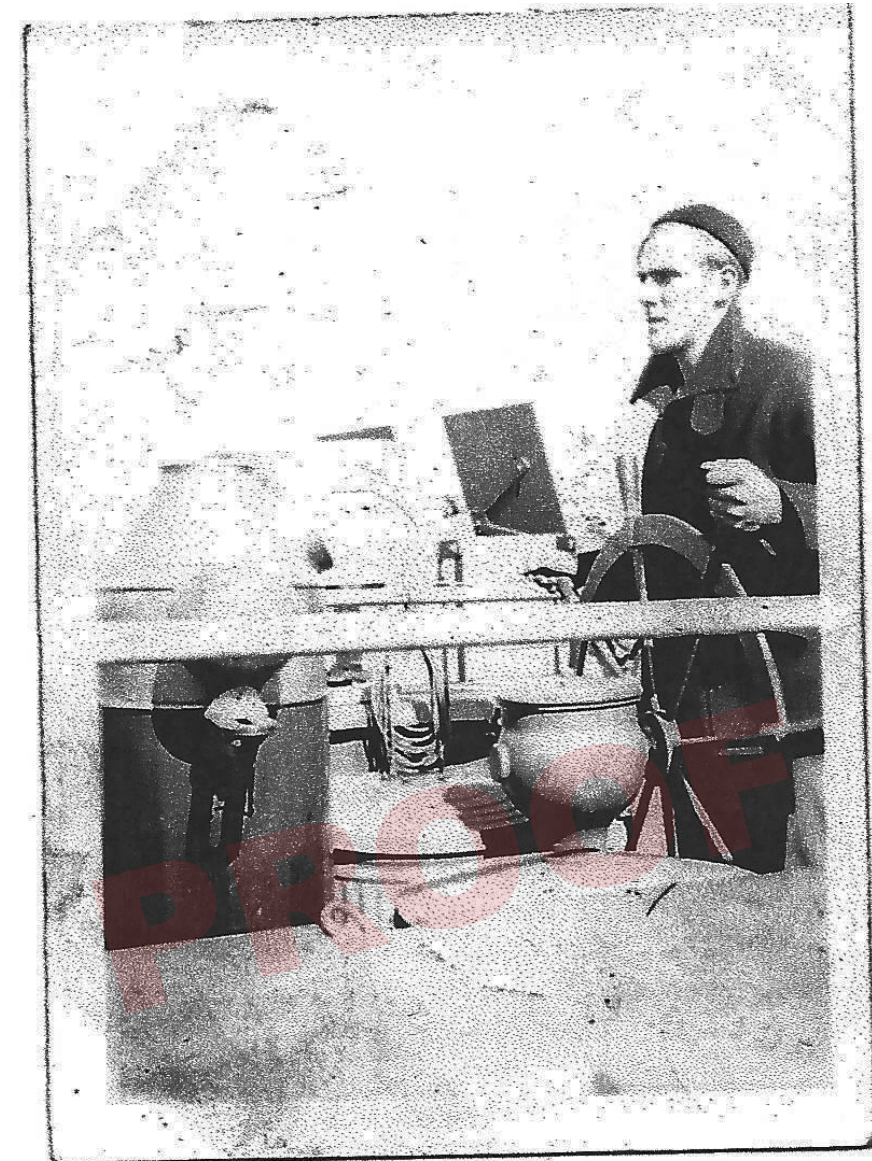
5/22/1942: Today, the seas have been very rough. Joe and I were feeling the queasy stomach but kept our meal down by avoiding anything liquid like coffee. Others were not as lucky. The merchant crew enjoyed our discomfort a lot. It must have been the first time since the Equator party, that I have seen them all laughing at us.

The rough seas will slow our travel to Chile. I wonder if the Navy knows where we are traveling. I could use some mail from home. Louis sent his letter home in New Zealand, so they do take mail back to the states, I guess.



*Wayne Fink scrubbing his hammock
on the deck of the SS Meriwether Lewis*

5/25/1942: We arrived in Chile. I am not sure the name of the port but told we are in the Northern part of the country. They began unloading the mining equipment. I was told we would be moving up the coast to unload the sand. This is because the bulk material unloading equipment was located there. They will also load us with bulk materials as well.



*Ray training at the 'After-Steering Station' located
on the poop deck or aft deck area of the ship.*

5/26/1942: They had unloaded the sand this morning. They are now loading copper ore and nitrates into separate cargo holds. Oh, I got mail as did Louis and a couple of others. So, the Navy DOES know where I am. The letter was from Marie saying I am again an uncle! Brother Charlie's wife, Dorothy, had another boy, they named him Leroy. He must get home more than me. I have yet to be back. The letter was dated April 9th. I guess it takes time to get to it to me, being all over the Pacific as I am.

5/27/1942: We are now loaded. We are headed North to the states with our one-gun protection. I was able to send Marie the coins and shell I collected on my travels around Asia. I even included some pesos from Chile. I traded the crewman some envelopes he will need to send the stationery I traded him earlier. He was very nice all around. I put a letter in with the coins explaining to Marie what to do with them. I also wrote a note to Dad letting him know I was okay.

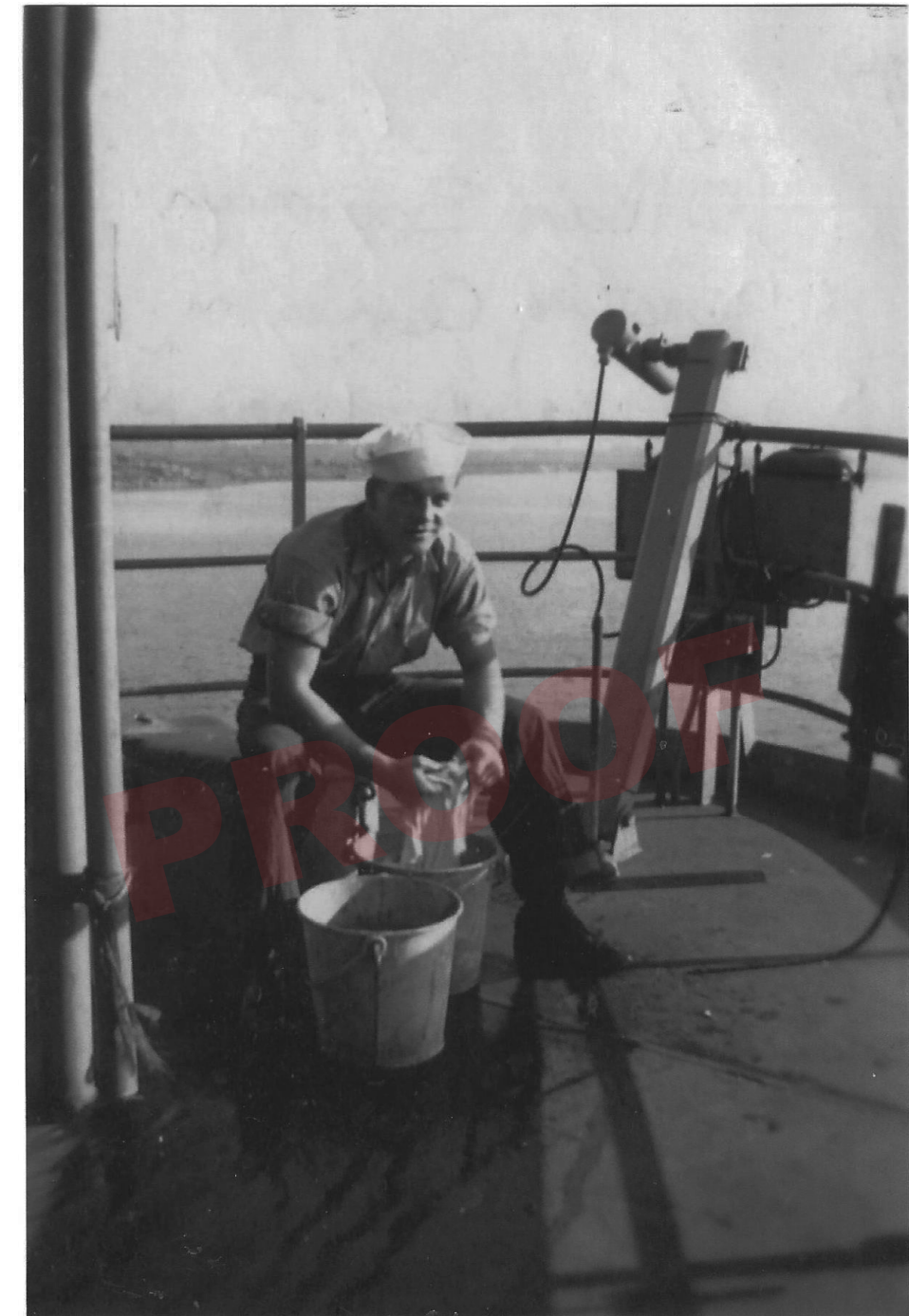


5/30/1942: The radio guys continue to put out scuttlebutt. I learned the Coast Guard had organized small civilian crafts as 'coastal pickets' in all of the west coast ports. This idea came, immediately following the attack on Pearl Harbor. A small group of skippers offered up their personal boats for anti-submarine operations along the western American coastlines. These "coastal picket forces" were made up entirely of civilian volunteers. Heroes, if you ask me!

6/05/1942: We get little news aboard this ship about the west coast action. But everything in the Gulf we hear is busy with sub attacks. I was told the attacks are happening because citizens are still ignoring the calls for coastal blackouts. This means the freighters and tankers moving along the shores at night are easily seen by the German navy against the lighted background. Taking advantage of that, the subs approach the coastline and the attacks are constant. Another reason for the 'picket forces' which are being done in the Gulf now.

6/07/1942: When on watch, I never see any enemy subs or other vessels. But on the East Coast, I continue to hear of attack after attack by German subs or U-boats, as they officially call them. I heard scuttlebutt about a shrimp fleet out of Louisiana, over 100 boats, are doing the 'picketing' watch while fishing.

William Bowman washing clothes on the fantail of SS Meriwether Lewis



6/10/1942: I may need to write more often. I hear almost every day of a ship being sunk in the Gulf or around the Caribbean. And the Nazis, to harass survivors, were shouting things in poor English like "Sorry, we can't help you, hope you get ashore" then they laugh! Many of these freighters are still unarmed. Also, the scuttlebutt is we are heading to the Canal Zone. Maybe this means we are going to get those added weapons mounted as promised!

6/13/1942: Today, we reached Balboa on the Canal Zone's Pacific side. It takes a day to move through the canal itself to the Atlantic side which is north of here. The canal goes somewhat up and down, not east to west. Balboa is basically part of Panama City. We did cross the Equator, but everyone is a 'shellback' now so no party was done. This will be my first trip through the Canal though!

6/15/1942: Hurray for the *Yacht Onyx*! I heard from Ensign Knell; the yacht was involved in rescuing survivors of the torpedoed tanker, *SS Aurora*, which included 12-Armed Guard personnel! Good job! I am told this happened sometime in May. Also, an unarmed tanker hauling gasoline was torpedoed and burned rapidly. Only half the crew survived.

We have reached Cristobal on the Atlantic side of the Canal. This is close to Colon. We can take on fuel there. This trip through the Canal was swell! It is hard to describe how huge the steel doors of the locks are in reality. Or how it feels to stand on the deck as the ship rises / sinks in the lock.

Now, we are headed for Key West with enemy subs all in our path. And us with only one gun and no depth charges.

Another event just told to me by Louis, our coxswain. It was about one German sub torpedoing three different ships, sinking two and damaging the third in the same day. I would like to get those promised weapons soon and join the fight here in the Gulf. Thankfully, I hear many of the survivors got rescued by the picket forces or other civilian vessels in the Gulf. This has got to be affecting oil and gasoline production. Maybe this is why, my sister Marie's letter talked about the rationing of gasoline and other items.

6/16/1942: More news on ships sinking around us. Another tanker was sunk just south of the Mississippi River and four Armed Guard guys were lost along with half the merchant crew. Sinking of ships and rescues are happening all over the Gulf and Caribbean, every day it seems. Yet, none of our watch personnel have seen any subs. Some of what we are told is old news and happened days or even weeks ago.

I just heard 5 of 6 Armed Guardsmen perished on the sinking of the Freighter *SS Heredia*. I think I spelled that ship's name right! Two more AGs were lost on freighter *SS Ogontz* but two AGs survive. Now it sinks in on me about when someone told me the Armed Guard was a suicide service!

More sad news about losing 3 AGs on the freighter *SS Calvert* but there is good news that 7 AGs survived, reaching Cuba. Also, good news was the crew and 7 AGs of freighter *SS Clare* survived in rafts near Cuba. At the same time, freighter *SS Elizabeth* was torpedoed with 7 AGs and most of her crew surviving to reach Cuba as well.

6/17/1942: We are getting close to Key West and Cuba. We have not sighted any enemy subs. Watches are placed all around the ship facing several directions. The sky at night is still beautiful, but my thoughts are on the continuous news of attacks happening all around us.

Tanker *SS Brown* is torpedoed and most of the crew and 17 AGs survived in lifeboats. Freighter *SS Beatrice*, freighter *SS Norlantic*, freighter *SS Alcoa Carrier*, tanker *SS Halo*, freighter *SS Alcoa Pilgrim* and the tanker *SS Carrabulle* were all recently sunk by German subs here is the Gulf and Caribbean. One good news is an 8 member AG unit fired on a sub as it tries to shell the freighter *SS Atenas* and drove it away from the ship. And there were no casualties! Hurrah! Also, I heard everyone survived the torpedoing of the tanker *SS New Jersey* including its 5 AGs. I got to stop talking to the communications guys.

6/18/1942: We have made it to Key West during the evening last night! We are to join a convoy KN-111 which is headed for New York. But first we will resupply and wait as the convoy is organized. One exciting news was to learn a Coast Guard Cutter sank a German sub just last week north of Cuba, very near us at Key West.

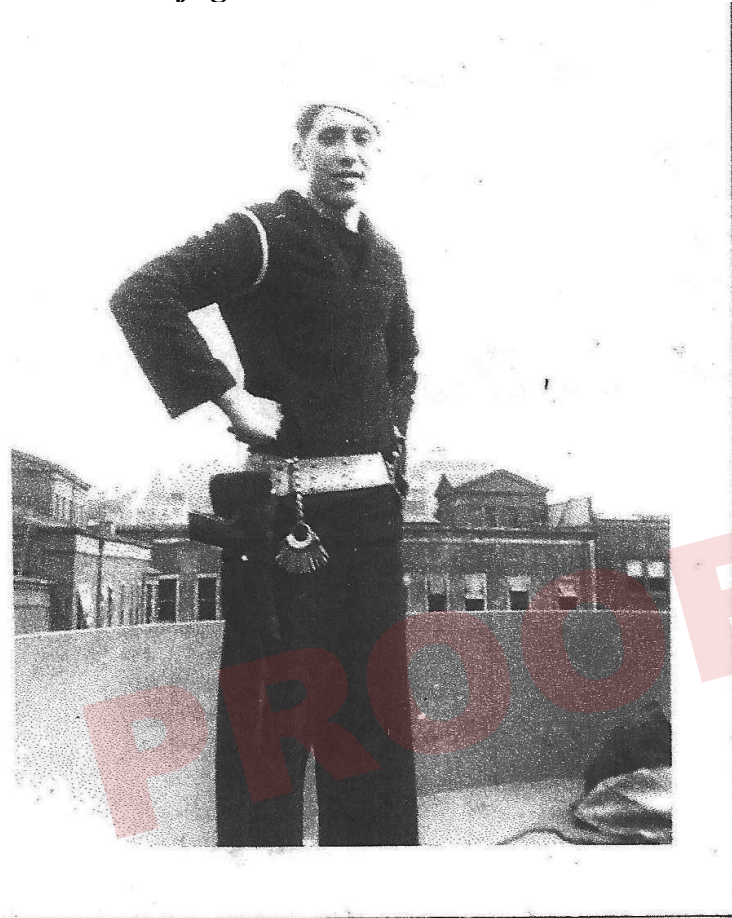
Some bad news about an earlier convoy that left from here in Key West, known as KN-109. KN means a convoy going to New York and starting from Key West. In that convoy, tanker *SS Esso Augusta* struck a mine laid by a German sub, a half mile south of the Chesapeake Bay entrance. She was damaged but no casualties, including its 13 member AG unit.

Tanker *SS Cherokee*, in a convoy, is torpedoed and sunk by a German sub east of Boston, Massachusetts. Half the crew is lost including one AG out of an 11-man unit. Sad. These attacks are along the route we are taking to New York! Hey, the convoy was waiting for us, I guess! We are already underway to New York.

6/22/1942: While in Key West there were no change to our armaments, but I was told our "ship's armaments will be adjusted in New York". Well, I hope so!

6/24/1942: Finally, we are arriving in New York! Where are the new armaments? We are being directed to anchor out in the harbor. No enemy vessels were observed on the way to New York.

Photo of Henry Ross French, standing watch on the aft gun deck while we were docked.



6/25/1942: Today, we are underway back south to Charleston, South Carolina, to be degaussed! It was done when the ship was built in Portland late last year. Maybe they saw something with the equipment that needs to be corrected. We do want to keep those mines from sinking us, so this is important to do.

6/28/1942: We have arrived in Charleston to have our mine detector equipment fixed. They will do the work tomorrow. I saw Fort Sumter as we passed up the Cooper River to the naval yard.

Editor's Note, Degaussing: Navy and merchant ships faced a new and dangerous weapon in World War II regarding the use of the magnetic mine. Fortunately, an effective means of defense had been developed even before our entry into the war.

6/30/1942: We are again underway to New York for new armaments, I hope! I am glad the degaussing was fast, so we can get back north. Maybe they didn't have room for us in New York and sent us down there to have this done instead of waiting around up north.

7/02/1942: Today, we were directed to a dock in New Jersey for the new guns. Immediately, several steel workers came aboard to begin installing mounts for the new guns. We are told to assist them doing whatever they asked, including hauling equipment and gun parts to their needed location. It took 3 of us to carry the barrel of the 3" gun. This is the same type of gun I was trained to use on the *USS Crosby* and a step up from that old 4" we now have. I am told this work may take 4-6 weeks to complete.

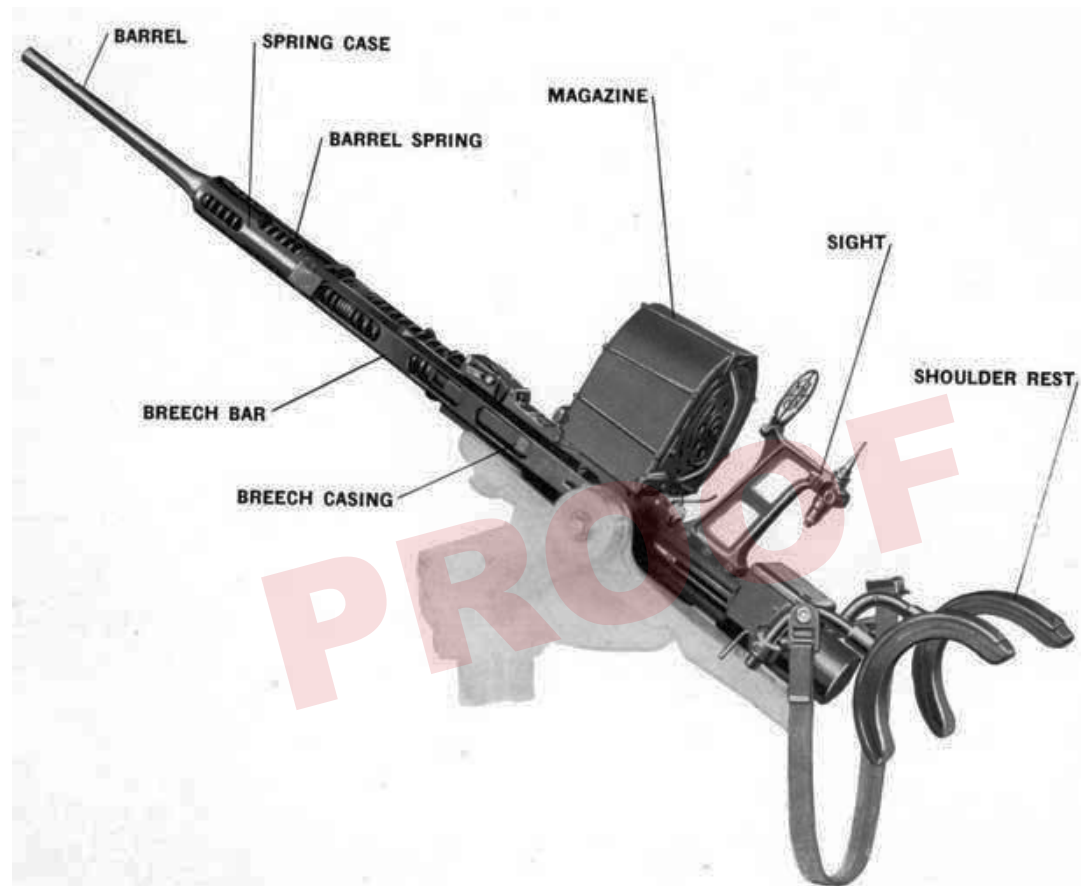
7/03/1942: I am back to my Friday writing in this journal. Not because things are so boring, but because I am so busy helping to get these guns installed. There are a lot, and I do mean a lot of parts to these guns. And you better not get parts mixed up! I don't think anything is planned for 4th of July as there is a war going on. Maybe, we will given some time to think about what we are fighting for today.

7/10/1942: Hello Friday and I am happy today! The 3" DP gun is 'almost' fully installed on the bow. We left the old 4" gun on the poop deck but the 3" makes it old hat.



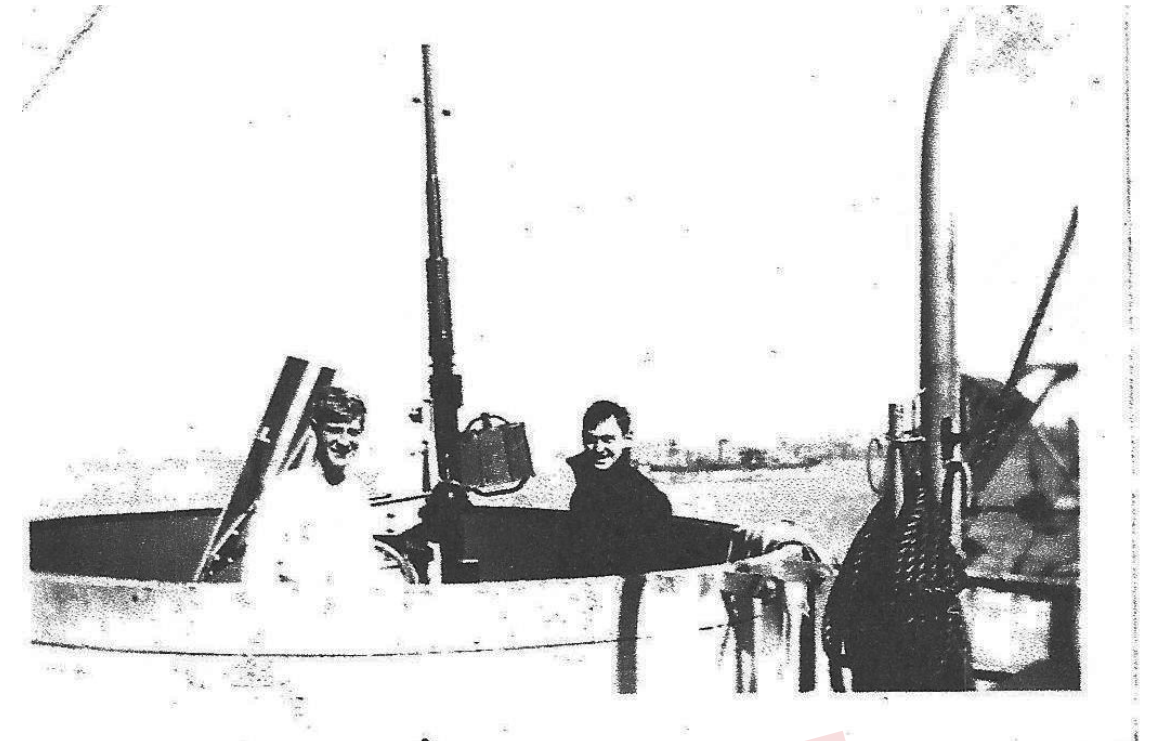
The 3 inch / 50 caliber, Dual-Purpose gun. The gun fired a projectile 3 inches in diameter, and the barrel was 50 calibers long (calculated barrel length is $3 \text{ in} \times 50 = 150 \text{ in}$).

7/17/1942: The four 20 MM guns were mounted one on each wing of the bridge and two were on the poop deck with the old 4" gun. They even gave our officers two .30 AA colts with 3,000 rounds. Who are they going to shoot with those pistols, subs? I did not learn how to shoot the 20 MM guns when I was on *USS Crosby*. Most of my time was on the 3" and the depth charge projectors.



Details of a 20mm anti-aircraft mounted gun. NA 19-N-32602

Editor's Note: The light, free-swinging 20mm machine gun, which the Navy adopted in November 1940, was a product of the Oerlikon Machine Tool Works in Switzerland, although our guns were all manufactured in the United States. As automatic weapons go, it was unbelievably simple and almost trouble-free.



*A 20 MM gun on the Meriwether Lewis.
Joe Beskid on the left with Wayne Fink, inside the gun tub area*

7/24/1942: Things are moving fast now on installing the new guns. None of us are getting much rest but having a swell time putting our new guns in order. I hope to be doing some training on them within a week or two. Not much to say but very busy. Glad we are at dock and not having to stand watch.

7/31/1942: We began training today and I was put on the 3" DP gun which made me happy. Only concern I have is, we are short on AGs to be able to operate all the new guns. Joe is with me on the 3" gun.

8/05/1942: I know its Wednesday, but I just have to say how happy I am. Four more AGs are being put aboard the *SS Meriwether Lewis* to help shoot these guns. It was nice, they came aboard just as we needed help loading the ammunition. There were 4800 rounds for the 20 MM guns and 100 AA shells for the 3" gun.

8/07/1942: Today, we got underway to Boston to join a convoy for England. I am told this by the scuttlebutt. Again, this convoys is given a name, this is BX-32C.

8/09/1942: Our ship is now leaving Boston in a convoy, going to Halifax. Everyone, including me, is assigned watch positions and times. Happily, I have evening watches because I enjoy the night sky over the waves, moving so calmly.



Ray, standing watch at the forward gun tub with a pipe in his mouth. John Bolton, (on right) standing watch.

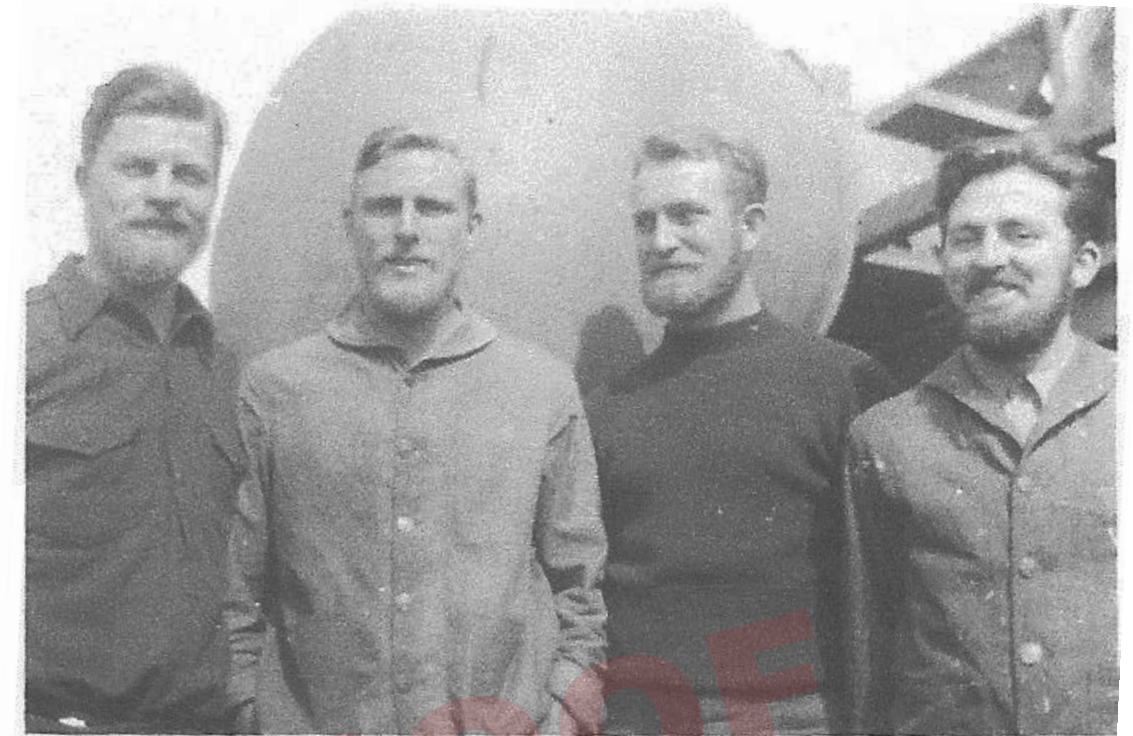
8/11/1942: Our trip was uneventful, and we reached Halifax today. The merchant crew is unloading some cargo and taking on cargo of something else. Lots of crates it looks like to me.

8/14/1942: We continue to drill and train on the new guns! Thankfully, I am assigned to the 3" DP gun that I know well and good at operating.

8/16/1942: I and my *SS Meriwether Lewis* are leaving Halifax, underway to England. This is going to be my first trip over the Atlantic and the closest to the war in Europe. We are in a convoy, HX-203, for protection. We are going slowly, about 10 knots, following behind a British tanker called *HMC Clausina* hauling fuel oil. I can smell the fuel oil. It stinks! I hope we don't have to follow it all the way to England. There appears to be some thick fog coming at us, as we are leaving out.

8/19/1942: I was told several ships are falling behind the convoy due to the thick fog and the reason our progress has been even slower. This slower pace is so the 'stragglers' can catch backup to the convoy for protection.

One ship did leave the convoy, the *SS Fort Townsend*, and it proceed to St. John's. Joe and I decided we would start a 'Beard Growing' contest to make the trip across more bearable.



Beard Growing Contest, SS Meriwether Lewis, August 1942, Ray is 2nd from the left.

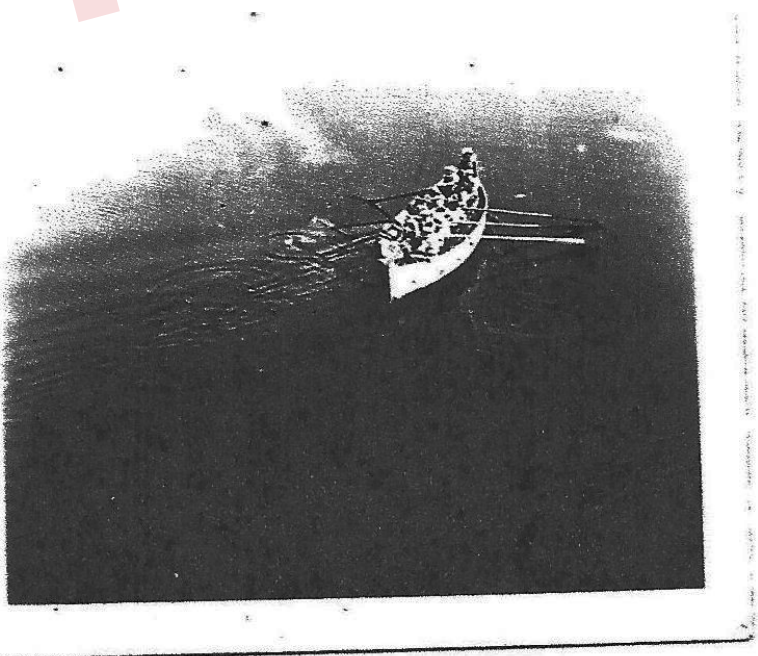
8/21/1942: It is Friday and I need to keep up with writing in this journal. We have stayed in our position within the convoy since we left Halifax. Everyone is taking turns standing watch. I will sometimes ask to switch for someone's night watch, as I enjoy the quiet and calm of the waves passing by the ship under the moon.

8/28/1942: We have reached Belfast Lough in Ireland. Some ships are dropping out of the convoy. Looks like about 8 or 10 departed for Belfast. Earlier, about 8 or 10 left the convoy headed for the port of Mersey near Liverpool, England. I was told that one ship had compass trouble and will stay in Belfast to have it repaired. We stayed out at anchor, waiting for the convoy to resume moving onto Wales, our next stop, with only about 8 or 10 ships left.

8/29/1942: We got underway last evening and were already at Swansea, a port in Wales by the afternoon. We have to wait in line to discharge our cargo. There were some in the convoy docking ahead of us so, we needed to wait our turn for a berth.

This gave me time to look across the water at the city's buildings along the horizon. The sight is swell and to think, here I am in Britain. Amazing! I noticed one ship in the convoy had 2 bombers stowed on its deck with their wings stacked alongside. This is all quite an experience.

To keep busy, we did some practice with the lift boats, normally used to get personnel to shore, around the bay at Swansea.



9/04/1942: We have moved up the coast of Wales to the port of Milton Haven to pick up supplies and fuel. No liberty is given. All we can do is see it but not go ashore. Maybe, we're leaving soon and there is no time for fun. Everyone continues to drill, and I clean the 3" gun almost every day. The weather is so damp, I need to keep these guns from rusting.

9/11/1942: We have been sitting at anchor outside of Milton Haven for almost a week now, after unloading at Swansea and loading stores for the next trip. I have not heard any scuttlebutt about where we are headed next. Joe and I did take time to get up a basketball game on deck. Not much of a game but fun. We used a soccer ball we got from a British ship anchored next to us. They said we could keep it.

9/17/1942: We are underway up the coast again towards Liverpool, England, to join up with a convoy going back to the U.S. I guess we will reload and come back again. That's what these Liberty ships were built to do. We are the wagon train filling the needs of Allies with supplies from America. That's why I joined almost a year ago. But I would like to see England up close, instead of, from a ship rail.



Ray is shaving one of the participants, at the end of the beard growing contest. Ray has already been shaved.

9/18/1942: We just arrived offshore from Liverpool this morning. As I write this evening, we are already underway to New York. This convoy, ON-131, is much bigger than the one we came here with crossing the Atlantic. We have several escorts with us for protection, as well.

After a month, we ended the beard contest. Neither Joe, Wayne nor I won.

9/24/1942: *HMCS SAGUENAY*, a Canadian destroyer, began firing its guns, torpedoes and hedgehog mortars just after dark. We are about half way home when they began shooting. The ship is one of several escorts assigned to the convoy and it appears they found an enemy vessel near us, probably a German sub.

9/26/1942: The scuttlebutt indicated there was an attack by a German sub and it sank the *SS John Winthrop* who was straggling behind since the 21st. I have not heard if there were any survivors. The ship had a detachment of 13 Armed Guards.

10/04/1942: The *SS Meriwether Lewis* and I arrive back in New York from Britain safely! This would have been an exciting trip except for the loss of the *SS John Winthrop*. We heard there were no survivors.

Again, the war is not a fun adventure, but I feel happy about what I'm doing for my country as part of the Armed Guard.

10/05/1942: Joe, the other AGs and I are told to pack our seabag to leave. We are being detached from the *SS Meriwether Lewis* and going to another ship but not necessarily as a group to the same ship.

At the AG Center, I learned my mail was still going to California but they will begin to transfer my mail location stateside to Brooklyn.

They are putting us up in the YMCA until our new orders come, because all the beds at the Center are full. This will also give us time to say our good-byes to one another.



Ray taking picture of SS Meriwether Lewis Crew goofing around, October, 1942 (Ray's illegal Camera).

From left to right. First is Henry Bowman, Harry French with the sock hat, then Joseph Fezell, Matthew Marzec with a sock hat on just behind Louis Hoegsted, Coxswain. 'Curly' Ramsey is holding Louis' arm back with Bill Blackwell and Wayne Fink hiding behind him.

Missing is Guy Billman, James 'Moon' Mulholland, John Bolton, Joe Beskid and Oren Bower, unless one of them is the person hiding behind Wayne.



*Top row, standing Left to Right is
James 'Moon' Mulholland, John Bolton and Raymond Boettcher.
Knelling is William Bowman and Oren L. Bowers.*

This was taken as everyone was being removed from service on the SS Meriwether Lewis in New York, on October 8th, 1942, and reassigned to other ships.

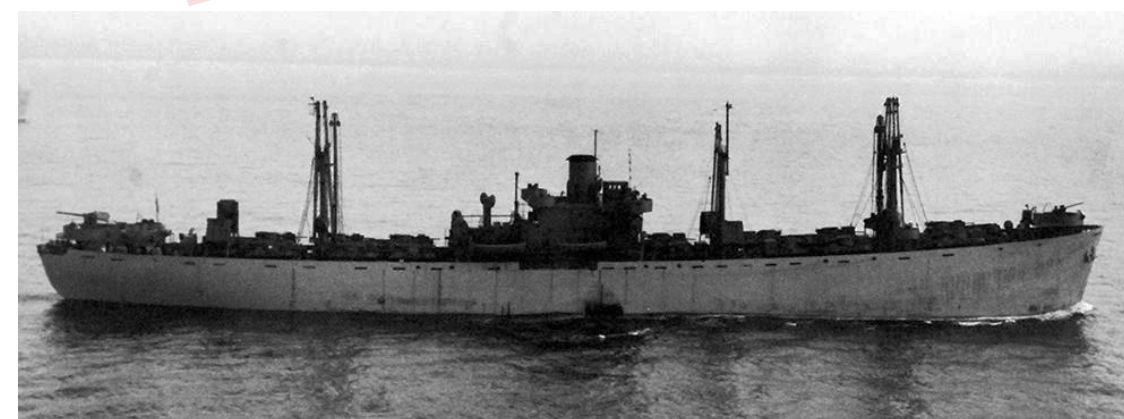
10/13/1942: My paper transfer to the Armed Guard Center, South Brooklyn, New York from the AGC in California, for mail and order tracking, has been completed. After sitting around here for over a week, they finally know where I am. I had a couple of letters from Marie and it is nice to know how things are at home. Also, I guess being lost in the system for a few days was because they were promoting me up 3 levels in rating, to Sea2c (seaman 2nd class). Wow, I must really be good at following orders and cleaning guns!

10/22/1942: I am still 'officially' reporting to AGC in Brooklyn and have been taken off the detach duty aboard the *SS Meriwether Lewis* for reassignment, likely soon, I hope. I am tired of sitting around Brooklyn waiting for a ship.

Picture is The Armed Guard Center's 'Main Deck', Brooklyn



11/09/1942: Finally, after almost a month, I got 'Detach Duty' aboard the U.S. Armed Merchant Vessel, *SS Collis P. Huntington*. Wayne and Joe are assigned to it as well. Again, it is nice to know some AGs on my ship. We located our rack and stowed our gear in assigned lockers. Later, I learned Louis was again my coxswain and many of the guys from the *SS Meriwether Lewis* rolled with me to this ship. My Armed Guard family is largely still together. I am happy.



*SS Caesar Rodney, type (EC2-S-C1) hull # 916,
twin to SS Collis P. Huntington, Hull # 0860*

11/10/1942: The ship got underway to Wilmington, North Carolina and our Officer, Lt. Corbett, gave us a quick tour of the ship. The ship is a new liberty ship just launched in September, about 2 months ago.

Then, he took us to see our armaments; five 20 MM guns, my favorite; a 3” gun on the bow and a 5” gun on the stern. The Lieutenant assigned Joe and I to the 3” gun.

11/14/1942: My new ship, the *SS Collis P. Huntington*, today left Wilmington, North Carolina going towards Norfolk, Virginia. We have 14 AGs on board along with Lt. Corbett. The merchant crew is about 40 with 3 of them being cooks. This may be because we have our very own AG mess room on this ship. The cooks are Chinese and the food is very good, while it lasts.

11/20/1942: Everyone is assigned a watch duty which included carrying a .45-cal pistol. I knew, from using one on the pistol range at Great Lakes, that I couldn't keep a firm grip on the gun when I fired. Hopefully, I won't need it.

11/26/1942: Thanksgiving meal was great. But not as good as the Christmas meal we had on the *USS Crosby*. No after dinner cigars either. After eating, I had to scurry to my 1600 – 2000 watch station, near the top deck by the smokestack. Nice view. My first time up there. But I just about jumped out of my skin when the foghorn sounded! It was adjacent to the inside of the stack. Every time it sounded; my whole body shook!

We are now heading back to New York after we stop in Norfolk briefly, to get the supplies for our Christmas meal.

11/30/1942: Today, in Norfolk, steel workers came aboard to modify our armaments. My 3” gun on the bow was removed and a 20 MM Mark IV put in its place. More 20 MM guns are to be added to the poop deck and forecabin area (or forecabin, just behind and to the left and right of the bow) for a total of nine. I was moved to the 5” gun since the 3” was removed. They expect to be finished on the changes by the 10th of December.

12/07/1942: Today is Monday. It has been a year since Pearl Harbor and our official entry into this war. The ship's whistle was sounded, so we all could stop what we were doing and take time to remember those lost during that attack.

Some of the guys knew people who died there. It was a sad moment, but one that motivates us to finish the task at hand. When the whistle sounded a second time, we went back to what we were doing, only feeling a little different than before.

12/09/1942: While watching all the armament improvements, I was promoted again to S1c rating from S2c. I was still assigned to the 5” gun.

12/10/1942: The armaments are completed and we took on an additional 10-Armed Guard attachment (all have SEALc rating, Seal team). Immediately, the *SS Collis P. Huntington* was underway to be assembled into a convoy of 27 ships (NG-328). We are headed to arrive at Guantanamo on Dec 18 before traveling on to Bandar Shapur.

12/14/1942: There are ships everywhere, trying to organize into different convoys. As the ship was underway, I felt a sudden shift of the ship to the starboard. I was in the mess, eating breakfast. A collision alarm sounded and I rushed to my assigned station. I had to think twice where to go, since my 3” gun had been removed off the bow and my new assignment, the 5” gun, was on the stern.

We weren't under attack! We had been hit by another U.S. ship. This does happen, in crowded rough seas, I'm told. Orders were to man the stations for life boats and rafts, until the damage could be assessed. We are later told the ship will return to a New York port for repairs, as the damage was to one of the forward cargo holes.

12/16/1942: The ship is now docked at New York. I did not sleep well after the collision, for fear of us sinking and my drowning. I heard, the *SS Timothy Pickering* hit us as it was trying to find its own convoy to Guantanamo, NG-300.



Photo of SS COLLIS P. HUNTINGTON limping back to New York after a collision with the Dutch ship TALISSE in the Atlantic Ocean in 1944. See gash amidship. This was a 2nd collision for the SS Huntington in 2 years!

The **Pickering** put a gash in the front storage compartment, full of soybeans. The special 'seal group' of Armed Guards, all 10 of them, were hustled off to another ship for transport out. It would be a while before our ship could take them anywhere.

12/17/1942: While onboard, my buddies and I have nothing to do regarding the ship and its repairs. We have no watch duties to perform or defense drills.

So, we decide we needed a drink or two. We departed the ship this morning down the gangway. This is a rope affair of wooden steps, some short walkways wide enough for single file, reaching the dock. Since the ship continues to roll with water movement, the descent can be hazardous, if one is not holding firmly onto the rope handrail. One must roll with the rolling of the ship. But we made it ashore with some money in our pockets.

Needless to say, we are well acquainted with this departure and safely made it to the first bar encountered off the ship. I had a drink, others had quite a bit more than me. After several hours, we thought it time to return to the ship (since the bar was closing up).

All except William, who says he knows where to get drinks after hours, here in New York. No one was foolish enough to accept his invitation. And off he goes, alone, with the rest of us returning to the ship.

12/18/1942: During the morning mess, our loner, William, is nowhere to be found aboard ship. Louis allows a few of us to go ashore to look for him. And the first place to look for a sailor? Why the police station of course, to report a missing person maybe or to find one! And that's what we did.

Our buddy, William, is in a cell and severely beaten, it appears. The obvious and most truthful conclusion is, he was beaten by persons unknown, for resisting arrest. We begin waking him up in his cell and basically dragging him along the street to the ship's gangway. NOW, the trick was to get him up this single file, narrow walkway without him falling off and down to a sure death (which he likely deserved). If he fell down between the docks and the ship, as it rolls against the dock, he would be squashed. As expected, the guy begins to fall over the rope handrails. Joe and I grabbed him immediately by the arm. With help from others, we get the guy back on the gangway, thereby saving his sorry rear!

12/19/1942: Fortunately, for the Armed Guard group, being in friendly waters means there are unlikely to be any enemy aircraft or submarines to attack the ship. Therefore, our protection services for the ship's defense, are not required.

After hearing of William's episode, the lieutenant tells us to find a home somewhere other than on this ship. Lt. Corbett is getting off as well because the soybeans are beginning to rot and stink ungodly. He says, he doesn't need to have much contact with any of us until January. Get a room at the YMCA or something, he says. But, be sure to let the AGC in Brooklyn know how to quickly reach you, if plans change.

Since I didn't have to account for my whereabouts to anyone, I took the train home to Cincinnati. I wanted to see the family. I hadn't seen them in over a year. And to think, I will still be collecting sea hazard pay.

12/20/1942: I arrive at the station around noon and caught the bus home. Marie answered the door and was happy to see me. She was not happy I didn't let her know I was coming! Bill and Charlie, both in the Army, were not expected to be home for Christmas, but everyone seemed glad I was there. My brother Frank, who is 14 years older, is married to a woman named Norma. I was hoping to see both Frank and brother Howard as well as visiting around with other various family members I haven't seen. It was especially good to see my father.

12/26/1942: I was having such a good time, I didn't have time to write in this journal. Truthfully, I almost forgot I brought it with me. But that's okay. I did get to see Frank and Norma on Christmas Eve. She has a sister Florence working at the SS Kresge store on West Fifth Street, downtown.

She says Florence wants to get a picture with me in my uniform and for me to come have lunch with her. I remember meeting her before I joined the service. She has a son, I think.

12/28/1942: I took the bus this morning, getting off at Fifth and Vine streets and walked over to the store. When I entered, it was close to noon. Florence was there waiting for me near some displays. She was with a co-worker, whom I learned later was also named Norma like Florence's sister. I thought it better to go somewhere for lunch instead of the SS Kresge's lunch counter. I'm sure they have eaten there often enough. Since 'Norma' was standing right there with Florence, I invited her along as well. She was a good-looking girl, so why not.

We found some eatery around the corner serving double decker burgers and onion rings, which Florence said were great. As we ate, Florence made the official introduction. Norma was a 'country girl' who lived at the end of the bus line, beyond Madisonville. I don't even know where Madisonville is located.



SS Kresge's lunch counter.

Norma commented how they cleared the shelves of anything made in Japan, the day after Pearl Harbor. The girls talked about the store and their other workers, none of whom I knew. Norma said one of the guys in the store had left to join the Navy. Unfortunately, I have already forgotten his name to write it here.


Time had passed so quickly, we suddenly had to jump up to go. I paid the bill on the run out the door. When we reached the store, I met another co-worker named 'Rita' who had a wonderful smile on her face. As I left them at the store, I indicated I hoped to see everyone again in the future. But my thoughts, at is time, were about me getting back to the war and being in New York!

12/31/1942: I am planning to leave out in the morning to head back to New York. But today, Frank, Norma and Florence stopped by with a cake for my 21st birthday. Today, was the warmest day I can remember, when having a birthday. This gave us the opportunity for a picture with Norma, Florence and I. Frank took the picture with his new camera. It is much nicer than the one I have stashed away on ship



Frank Boettcher's wife Norma (on left), Ray, Florence (Shuey) Schunk, Norma's sister. Florence is a widow with a nine-year-old son. Florence is the one who works with Norma Hewitt at SS Kresges.

1/02/1943: I have done nothing since the collision but enjoyed a holiday with my family. I get word, when I arrive at the YMCA, from Louis about my being officially appointed GM3c from S1c, an increase in rate. I need to go on leave more often if I get promoted each time. Louis told me Wayne and Guy were taken off our ship and reassigned to other ships, during the holidays.

	<u>Gunner's mate</u>	GM		
	Gunner's mates operate and maintain all gunnery equipment; guns, turrets and associated equipment. They repair hydraulic and mechanical systems, and make detailed casualty analysis. They test ammunition and their ordnance components. GMs train and supervise personnel in the handling and stowage of ammunition and assigned ordnance equipment.			

1/08/1943: I learned the ship will be ready the first of February. So, I need to plan on being aboard by January 31st. That still gives me 3 weeks to see the town! I have checked in with the AGC early this week. I just sat around there trying to see if I hear any good scuttlebutt. It's Friday, so I'm again back to journal writing but when there's not much news, it is difficult.

1/15/1943: Some AG buddies and I wandered the streets here in Brooklyn. We enjoyed some of the eateries in the area, especially when I found some good old sauerkraut and sausage. It is not a very popular meal because of the war, but it was good nonetheless.

I did learn, there continues to be attacks on convoys going to England and when they are returning to the States. I learned at the AGC, a cargo freighter, **SS Louise Lykes**, in a convoy going to Ireland was sunk. The Armed Guard unit aboard gave a good fight, damaging the sub according to reports. Sadly, all were lost including the 24-man AG unit aboard her. Suicide duty is what they said.

1/22/1943: Again, the group just wandered the streets. Sometimes stopping to get a drink now and then. Most of my money is going home, so I can't spend much. We can play pool or some card games at the Red Cross Canteen Club. It's free, too. They always had coffee and donuts, anytime of the day. I even was able to make a call back home from there. My sister, 'Till, answered. She is not much of a talker so it was a short call. Marie's the talker in the family.

Louis told me; Joe will be delayed in returning to New York. His mother had passed away on the 16th from a heart attack. Joe was home, just by the chance of our ship being damaged. I am sure he was not expecting to be there, when she died. I am sure he was glad to see her one more time as well.

1/29/1943: Well, I finally get back on the ship. I can't say I didn't enjoy the time at home, but sitting around the AGC for most of January is making me lazy. I am getting my seabag together and ready to go aboard good old **SS Collis P. Huntington**.

I checked in at the AGC with Lt. Corbett. I learned 8 guys were taken off the ship and 11 more put aboard. I don't recognize the names of the new guys, but Joe, Oren and the Bills (Blackwell, Bowman, Fezell) are still attached to the ship. Seems to be about 30 AGs on board now.

I heard more sad news about attacks at the AGC. Another freighter was sunk off the coast of Africa, but all survived reaching the coast in rafts and life boats. The ship had a 23 person AG unit. I heard another story about one Armed Guard and two Dutchman, who were rescued after **83 days** in a raft! They were hit on November 2, 1942 and lived on raw fish, fowl, and rainwater until found on the 24th of January. Another convoy straggler, **SS City of Flint**, was sunk, but heard 20 of the 24 AGs were rescued along with 28 of the crew.

2/01/1943: I was first aboard and able to get my same locker and rack. I met up with the new guys. Most were all S1c rated and had some sea voyage experience. The scuttlebutt is already saying we are heading to Scotland. I missed going ashore to see Scotland when I was there last year. Saw Ireland and Wales, mostly from the ship's rails, as well.

2/08/1943: The crew is loading supplies for Scotland. Us AGs are loading our ammunition and stowing it. Mostly for the 20 MM guns and some for my 5" gun on the stern. We do daily cleaning of the guns. We check them operationally without firing. I did a check on spare parts for my gun. Today, I got some surprising mail!

The good-looking girl I had lunch with in Cincinnati when I was seeing Florence, wrote me a letter. I guess I should write her back. I need to think on what to say. Definitely not the stuff I write to my sisters. I never had a girl interested in me.

2/14/1943: Well, its Valentine's Day and I don't mean my Dad's birthday. I got teased every year because my dad's name is Valentine. I need to write Norma back. I don't think I should write anything stupid or weird. I guess, I should say just 'Dear Norma' and thank her for her letter. I hope she can read my poor handwriting. Oh yes, ask about her and her family. Have her tell Florence and Rita at Kresges, I say 'Hello'. I remember, that Rita girl had a great smile.

I need to tell Norma, we are leaving out of the states, so I won't be able to get a letter if she writes again. At least for a while. Yes, I need to ask her to write back. Her letters have got to be more interesting than what the sisters send. Remind her, that I remember the lunch we had and would like to do it again.

Let's see, the closing. Best just to say 'Forever Friends' maybe. Oren says my letter looked fine. Bill says, how can you, be friends when you met her just once. I'm glad she put her return address on the envelope, so I can mail my letter before leaving New York.

2/18/1943: I am aboard the *SS Collis P. Huntington* and we are finally sailing for Loch Ewe (Scotland). I am happy to be afloat again. It seems like it's been a long time. Our convoy, HX-227, looks to have about 70 some odd number of ships with a lot of escorts for our protection. I hope I can get ashore when we get to Scotland, this time. I would like to get something for my sisters.

2/25/1943: I learned from our radio guy, Ed Hegar; an RM3c, that the convoy has a straggler. We know those are the ships the German subs like to go after. I became concerned on learning it was the *SS Meriwether Lewis*, my former ship.

3/3/1943: Well, scuttlebutt was wrong. We and about half the convoy are veering off towards Iceland. Our ship did not have navigational information for Reykjavik Harbor or even for Iceland, so we sat out in the vicinity of Sangerdi Light. A Coast guard cutter, *USCGC Bibb*, found us and guided us into the harbor. The radio guys know the story about everything, while I just lean on the rail and watch the sites.

Some cargo was unloaded here in Reykjavik. It took a couple of days, as there were not enough berths for everyone to dock at the same time. When we got into a berth, our Lieutenant was hoping to get additional ammunition for the guns. He thinks we are under-supplied for the number of guns we have.

3/04/1943: It's not Friday, but I have to stand watch tomorrow, so I thought about writing another letter to that Norma at SS Kresges. She seemed nice. We are anchored in the bay and it looks like a beautiful place. I will write her a letter, as there is not much else to do here. I will go with the same 'Dear Norma', say hello to Rita and Florence. I will close with 'Forever'; no, I better change that after what Bill said. I will say 'Always Friends' instead. Again, the teasing about writing to someone I met only once continues from the group. I wonder if she writes to other guys.

Oh yes, I need to tell her, I can't give her details because of the censors. I guess I can tell her, I am only half way to where I am going. I wonder how long it will take this letter to get to her. At least the postage is free. I can afford that. I'll mail it before leaving Iceland.

3/06/1943: Louis personally informed me and the rest of the old *SS Meriwether Lewis* crew, about her being sunk. He was also part of that crew. He knew we were just detached in October. She had fallen behind the convoy. Four days ago, before we reached Reykjavik, German subs sank her when torpedoes hit her cargo compartment full of ammunition. By the time a rescue ship reached her, after 2 days of following a 20-to-30-mile trail of floating automobile tires, no survivors were found.

There were about 75-77 on board and 31 of them were AGs. Hoegsted gave us some time alone to remember our ship and crew. He was good in that way.

3/07/1943: The ship is now underway in a new convoy with a new code of course, RU-14. The scuttlebutt again says Scotland is the destination. We will see if they're right this time.

3/10/1943: What a stressed day it was. After hearing about the *SS Meriwether Lewis* attack, you can imagine what we thought when the 'battle stations' alarm sounded. I rushed to my 5" gun at the stern and waited orders. It was 1430 hour.

An unidentified aircraft was approaching directly along our beam, which would put it directly above us. I heard the 20 MM guns fire a lot of rounds, maybe 200-300. The plane veered off but began circling us. We were told to fire 3 shots of our 5" 38 caliber gun at the plane, which we did immediately, forcing the plane to widen its circling pattern.

We stopped firing as the plane began to move away but it appeared to be signaling us as it did so. It all lasted only 15 minutes. Later at chow, we were told our actions were commendable, but everyone was glad we did not hit the plane. The plane was a British Sunderland Flying Boat. An Ally no less.



5" / 38 caliber, Mark 12



British Sunderland Flying Boat

3/11/1943: We have reached Loch Ewe in Scotland! I think, I can now go back trusting my scuttlebutt information. Lt. Corbett again makes comments about insufficient ammunition in his reports, especially after the recent aircraft incident. The waters around us are so full of ships, we are redirected over to Belfast Lough to anchor. Now, we wait for a berth to unload.

3/13/1943: It's Friday. We have been sitting here, anchored in the bay at Belfast Lough. No mail has been delivered, probably because they don't know where in the British Isles, we are sitting. I sleep, eat, clean guns, do drills and stand my scheduled watches. Nothing new, nothing happening, but all boring.

We did play some basketball on deck for fun. But it was bitter cold and we played only a few minutes. Still better than sitting. No shore leave is being granted.

3/20/1943: Scuttlebutt again is, they have a berth for us in Loch Ewe next week. We will know the truth exactly, if and when, we get underway. This past week was the same as the last, except the strong winds have made it much colder, if that's possible. During my night watch, it was difficult for me to see much in such a cold wind. Almost makes your eyes blurry from shivering so much.

3/24/1943: The *SS Collis P. Huntington* finally has us departing Belfast intended for London according to Louis. Instead, we anchored at Loch Ewe Scotland, but didn't dock anywhere.

4/02/1943: Yesterday, we pulled anchor. Never getting to the dock. We instead headed for Oban, Scotland. It seems nobody wants our cargo, so we are touring Scottish ports until the ship can find a home. It was just a short trip and we got to Oban today. Better stop writing as it is very late.

4/07/1943: Weather is getting more spring like and less windy. I know I haven't gotten any letters from Norma 'Kresge' but I will write her another one. She seems like a nice girl and yes, I only met her once. This will be my 3rd to her, but in her February letter, she was encouraging me to write her back.

Let's see, I need to stay with 'Dear Norma', mention I was just dropping a line to say 'Hello', ask about her family, have her tell Rita 'Hello', apologize for the poor handwriting and hope, they are taking it easy at the store. Whew! Oren says I need to mention the great scenery from the ship, even if we can't go ashore. Again, more teasing about writing to a ghost, I've seen only once.

Joe said to tell her how we sailors went sailing in the harbor, using a life-raft. It was fun and we did it most of the day. I need to remember to tell her to ignore part of my address. It is used only for foreign ports.

What else do I need to say? Oh, wish her luck and happiness (Bill puts that in all his letters home) and close with 'Forever Friends'. Don't want her to wonder why I changed it from the first letter to the 'Always Friends' in the second. Hopefully, I can get this sent while we are doing all this cruising around the British Isles.

4/12/1943: We left from Oban yesterday, without unloading, and again, we anchored at Loch Ewe, Scotland. But not for long. We are underway now for Methil, Scotland. Seems we haven't been sent to this port before. Are there any ports left for us to anchor in their bay? Do we smell bad or something?

4/14/1943: We arrived Methil, Scotland, but again, just for a short time. Scuttlebutt has us leaving tomorrow for London. I will believe it, when we get someplace to dock and unload.

4/17/1943: The *SS Collis P. Huntington* arrived in London at the Southend Docks but still out, away from shore. This is my first time here. On the *SS Meriwether Lewis*, we were all around England but I never got here to see London. It would be nice to put my foot on English soil.

4/23/1943: Lots of activity here at Southend. It's Friday. We did have to wait 3 days for this dock assignment, since so many ships are bringing supplies. But still, no liberty to see London. As soon as we are unloaded, we are to pull away for another ship to unload, so we better stay onboard says Louis.

4/25/1943: Today was Easter. The food was very good in our own, special, mess area. We had ham, potato salad, green beans and coffee. The cooks even had apple pie but only one piece to a customer, I was told. Somehow, Joe ended up with two pieces of pie.

4/30/1943: Not much to write about again. It's Friday and we are anchored outside of London. The sights are nice, but I'm sad we aren't able to visit up close. To be walking the streets and seeing the 'pubs' they have, would be great! I don't know how long before we leave out from here. My guess is we will go back home and get more supplies to bring back here.

5/04/1943: The *SS Collis P. Huntington* is finally underway, but then, we anchored just farther out of Southend, waiting for the convoy to 'I don't know where'.

5/07/1943: We had joined up with a convoy, FN-1013, on Wednesday going back up the coast to Methil. The Lieutenant says we will anchor here and be meeting up, on the 9th, with another convoy, EN-226. There should be 10+ ships but without escorts, he said.

5/10/1943: On Sunday we joined up with the convoy going to Loch Ewe. Gosh how many times have we seen that harbor on this trip? A lot!

5/11/1943: Today, we jumped convoys to one headed to New York, ON-183. It has been a lot like when I take trips home, jumping from one train to another to reach Cincinnati.

5/14/1943: Well, things have now settled down and we now have a regular work schedule. We have our work detail for cleaning and scrubbing our gun areas, standing watch, and the ever-present washing of clothes. Then, there are ship activities of drills and hanging our sleep gear out on deck for airing.

5/21/1943: The trip back is more relaxed than when we were going to Britain. No airplanes, no sinking ships. I did hear one night, an escort, and there are a lot of escorts on this trip back, shooting off some depth charges. Reminds me of those I shot off on the *USS Crosby*.

5/25/1943: The great *SS Collis P. Huntington* has brought us safely back to New York today, from England. Lt. Corbett informs me, paperwork has come through and that I am now, officially, a GM3c (Gunner's Mate 3rd class). It only took 5 months for the paperwork to come through. And I will be getting leave, along with the rest of his AG group, for a week when we hit the docks.

5/26/1943: I start my first 'authorized leave' today. I am to be back here by June 6th. My plan is to see 'Norma Kresge', if possible. I'll ask Florence to help with this. I will stop writing here, since I need to catch a bus to the train station. I am storing my journal and seabag at the AGC. I will write when I get back.



Ray on leave near his home



Photo Norma had taken when Ray visited



Valentine (Ray's Dad), Howard (Ray's oldest Brother) and Ray during May's visit home, 1127 Queen City Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio.

6/05/1943: Well, it's late. I have just gotten back onboard ship, this morning. I did some clothes washing early. But when a tug pulled alongside us, its' soot from the smoke stack just covered me! I only have two sets of clothes, so I had to do wash, again! Also, everyone is arguing about why some AGs are able to detach off the ship and who will get their rack / locker. Joe and I did visit the AGC in Brooklyn, to look at the list of AGs lost when the *SS Meriwether Lewis* went down in early March. We didn't know anyone listed. Everyone we served with on the ship must have detached off to other ships.

Speaking of detaching off; Oren, the 3 Bills (Bowman, Blackwell, Fezell) and Henry Ross are to be reassigned to other ships tomorrow. This leaves Louis, Joe and I from the original group. Scuttlebutt is, Louis has been promoted to Boatswain's Mate, BM1c. I wonder who will be the new coxswain.

I had a swell time on leave. First thing, I want to do tonight, is start on a letter to Norma, not 'Norma Kresge'. If I want to write about the other Norma, I will say 'Frank's Norma'. I did get to see sister-in-law Norma on this visit. Florence did help me find a way to see Norma and Rita Bergen, the girl with the smile. We all went to a picture show and I sat next to Norma. That was very nice.

Let's see, what to write to Norma? Ask about the family, mention the tug boat and how I wish I had someone to wash my clothes.

Gosh, I hope she doesn't mind my writing so often. She asked if I had gotten her letter. She sent it after getting my two letters, from New York and Iceland. Told her there was another one from Britain on the way and no I have not seen any of her letters.

In my letter I would like to say, 'I have wanted to ask you for a date, but I couldn't get up the nerve'. I want her to know how I am always thinking of her. I did want to ask her out. I will write 'keep the star burning bright until I see you again.' I hope she thinks of me as much as I do of her. Oh yes, ask her to write often. Do I dare close with 'Love Raymond'? What would Oren have told me to do? Probably tell me not to use 'Love'.

6/08/1943: I got a letter from her today, just like she said I would! Is it too soon to write back? I think I should respond to her letter. It will be the second time since her first one, when. . . February! When I read her letter, I felt almost homesick.

She reminded me how much brighter the stars are at her house than there in New York. Even the breeze was nicer. She asked how my trip back (at Christmas) had been. I'll tell her how cold, and terribly crowded the train was.

Should I tell her, it is so hot here in New York, I am going ashore in my swim trunks to see a movie with some buddies? Do I ask if she thinks of me, when she looks at the stars, like I do; thinking about her when I look at the stars? Anyway, Oren says not to close with 'Love Raymond' unless I am really serious about her. Stay friends and maybe try 'Lots of Luck & Love' says Joe.

Before I forget, while I was gone on leave, new ready lockers were added to the 5" gun area on the stern. Now we have enough for all the equipment and the added personnel needed for operating the gun. The Lieutenant gets things done for us and I appreciate it.



Ray Took a Picture of SS Collis P. Huntington AGs sitting around, June, 1943 (Ray's unauthorized Camera)

6/10/1943: I got another swell letter from Norma. I guess she thought I was thinking about a blonde, when I wrote my address incorrectly for her. I'll jokingly tell it was a red-head, not a blonde. I hope she'll know it's a joke and laugh. This letter was sent to me before I went on leave. She had poison ivy. I told her to just stay away from it, and she won't get it! I think of her every night.

I need to tell her what the bus driver told me, when I left her house last time. She'd be surprised, but I almost believed him! She wants me to stay away from areas of blackouts, but I need to tell her, blackouts help me to think of her.

Oh, I got to remember to ask about her family when I write. Also, it might be a while before I can write again, since I will be traveling the seas again. I need her to tell Rita, I haven't written to her because I don't have her address. Should I ask Norma to get it for me or is that not proper? Joe said don't ask Norma to get it for you, because I would cause trouble between them. I'll do Joe's 'Lot of Luck and Happiness' but still end with 'Love Raymond'. I prefer Raymond over just 'Ray'. It sounds more mature.

6/12/1943: Well, I got a letter from Norma, sent just after I left Cincinnati returning here. She mentions the blackouts again. I need to write and let her know how important it is to turn lights off during these events. Also, I think my ears are ringing, knowing her family is probably talking about her and me being out together.

When I do my night watches on this trip, I am sure I will look at those stars and think of her. Maybe, even imagine her head is on my shoulder and my arms around her, like at the movie theatre. I need to tell her this.

I'll stick with Joe's suggested closing but add 'Lots of Love, Luck and Happiness' and 'Love Raymond'. I like using this closing better. She is a special girl and I want to see her again, on my next liberty home.

6/13/1943: I was hoping for another letter from Norma before we head out in a convoy. It is hard to get a letter sent or received, when we are sitting out in the bay. What I need, is to have her send me a picture of her, to put on my locker door.

Oh, she did mention something in her last letter about a vacation. I should wish her a good time in my letter. I need to have her tell Rita, I said 'Hello'. I will close with my perfect saying like the last letter. I think its swell and it flows well.

6/15/1943: We raised anchor today. The **SS Collis P. Huntington** is departing New York in convoy, HX-244, of 80 ships or more, plus a lot of escorts. Big convoy looking at it from the rail. Our cargo is explosives along with the usual general stuff. I hope no torpedoes find that storage hole.

6/22/1943: It's Tuesday, but still nothing to write about. The trip is going smoothly and I have not heard any scuttlebutt about attacks on our convoy. There was word about a Coast Guard Cutter **USCGC Escanaba** being sunk close by here, off Greenland. There seems to be a lot of talking among the ships in the convoy.

Several ships did break from our convoy to return to New York, due to some type of mechanical issues, but we are running smooth. Weather is nice. The Lieutenant has given us time to ourselves most evenings, unless you have a watch to stand.

6/27/1943: I need to sit here and write to Norma, but I really have so little to say. Darn, I am out of ink and so is Joe. I'll write in pencil. I'm sure she won't mind! I'll have her say 'Hello' to the rest of those girls working at Kresges. I hope, it is not too hot there, inside the store. Weather here continues to be great and the trip uneventful. I hope, she remembers the letter I sent her earlier. If so, she will know where we are going. I got to be careful. The censors will cut up or markup my letter if I say too much.

Still, I think the stars are brighter in the U.S. than anywhere I've traveled. I seem to be a little homesick on this trip. I want to let her know; I would like to ask her on a date but not in a letter. I'll ask her next time I am home. I am sticking with my closing words and Joe can just stew about it! I like 'Love Raymond'. After my visit home with her, the closing is just right!

Oh, I forgot! I need to mention, she might get a telegram from me. Will she get the telegram before this letter? Better give it some time or this letter might get to her first. And the package I am sending. I hope it's the right size. With rationing, there are not a lot of choices.

*Editor's note: The **rationing** scheme worked by allocating each type of **clothing** item, a 'points' value which varied, according to how much material and labor went into its manufacture. Eleven coupons **were** needed for a dress, two needed for a pair of stockings, and women's shoes meant relinquishing five coupons. Make-up was never rationed, but was subject to a luxury tax and was very expensive.*

6/30/1943: The **SS Collis P. Huntington** has gotten us to Scotland and we travel up the River Clyde, which eventually reaches Glasgow. But all the docks are on the west entrance of the river such as Gourock, also called Port Clyde. Port Glasgow is near here, and not actually in the city area, which is farther upriver.

I think I will get a picture of me, in one of those Scottish outfits. Joe says they are doing those type of pictures at the Red Cross Service Station in town along with free coffee and donuts.



*Picture taken of Ray in Scotland
at the Red Cross Service Center, near Gourock.*

7/02/1943: I did get paid by the Disbursing Officer today, at least some of us did. I also got mail delivered from the London Fleet offices.

But, no letters from Norma. Now, with money in my pocket, I will try to get something for Till and Marie. Maybe a handkerchief with something Scottish on it. Let's see, Bonnie is a Scottish woman, I think. Might even find something for Norma. I can afford three handkerchiefs I suppose. I hope, there will be a letter from her soon.



*In Scotland; One of the Handkerchiefs bought for his sisters,
Matilda & Marie, and girlfriend, Norma.*

7/10/1943: I sent Norma a telegram to her house, yesterday morning, as I knew we were close to pulling out of the dock. I had asked her to telegraph back that all is well. But now that I think about it, I will be back in the states before I would get her telegram. I'm still disappointed, there has been no letters from her.

Our ship, the **SS Collis P. Huntington**, departed Gourock very late last night, almost midnight, for New York. We are in a convoy, ON-192, of about 90 ships with maybe 9 escort vessels. We seem to be very crowded together when looking out at the ships around us, during my 0400 – 0800 watch today. No collisions please!

7/22/1943: At noon mess, Ed, the radio guy, says the convoy chatter talked about a collision. It appears a British corvette, **HMCS 'The Pas'**, was badly damaged when colliding with the **SS Medina**. The **Medina** was able to continue on its departure from the convoy for Iceland. But the '**The Pas**' had to be accompanied to Halifax by another escort, **HMCS Blairmore**. Almost funny writing it here in my journal. I guess, we are crowded in this convoy. Glad nobody was hurt during the incident.



SS Medina, NNS Hull# 176, Built 1914 HMCS 'The Pas'- Flower class corvette

7/23/1943: The **SS Collis P. Huntington** again got us safely into New York, late last night. I am hopeful, there will be letters from my sister and especially from Norma. I need to let Norma know; I am now back in New York and hopeful of another leave to see her! I wonder if she realized, the telegram was from overseas, Glasgow, Scotland.

Hurray, I got two of her letters today. She says the telegram asks her to answer back. Did I say that when I wrote out the message to be telegraphed or not? Well, I sent her a letter at the end of June. She likely hasn't gotten that yet, either. Mail across the ocean can be slow, very slow. I need to have her get ready for my visit and some star watching.

I need to write her. I guess I should say something comforting, regarding her kitten dying. Maybe, I'll get her a real live Persian cat from Persia! If I get there during the war. This time, I will close with 'As Always Love' and just not let Joe see it. I'm beginning to think about her often, very often.

Also, I got letters from Marie, updating me on the whereabouts of Bill and Charlie. Still, I don't see how I might get a chance to run into them, somewhere.



1st Picture Norma sent of herself to Ray, while he was on the SS Collis P. Huntington.

7/26/1943: I told Joe, I got another letter from Norma, the 3rd one since I arrived back in New York. But now, I have a picture of her. I wish she didn't have on that fur coat, as it hides a lot of her 'beauty'. Joe liked it. He said he believes now, there really is a woman in my life. Her letter indicates she met up with a Coast Guard guy. I need to warn her, only sailors are trustworthy, not CGs. I wonder, if I can get a copy of the book she is reading. It sounds interesting from what little she says about it, in her letter.

About half of the AG group, including me, have been told to pack our seabag early tomorrow. We are being detached from the *SS Collis P. Huntington* for another ship. As long as I get my leave before shipping out, I am okay with the change.

7/27/1943: I am officially detached from duty on the *SS Collis P. Huntington*. Not sure what ship is next. I am on my way to Cincinnati when the bus arrives here at the AGC to take several of us to the train station. I will keep this journal in my seabag which I can store here, until I return from leave.

I am getting more than 2 weeks and not needed back here until August 15th. Some of the guys who have been sitting around the AGC told me I missed hearing Judy Garland sing at this AGC in Brooklyn, earlier this month.

But my mind is on seeing Norma again.

I plan to have the nerve to ask her for that date.

The Armed Guard Center, New Barracks on Dock C, Brooklyn, July 1943



Judy Garland at US Navy Armed Guard Center, Brooklyn, at 21 years of age, July 1943



8/15/1943: The leave was very disappointing. I did not get to see Norma. By the time I got home and had the nerve to call her house for a date, she had already left for her two-week vacation in Michigan City. But she did remember I would be home. She sent me a letter at my dad's house, here in Cincinnati.

She said she was having a good time and was missing a sailor she knows. I wonder who that might be. I'll ask her for some hints. Still, I wish I could see that young lady one more time before I go back on duty. She doesn't have to guess who that might be! I want to ask for another picture with less fur coat and more of her in it. The letter she sent had a return address of where she is staying.

I wrote her on Thursday before I left Cincy. I wonder if she'll get it before she leaves to go back home. I did thank her for the cards, especially the 'swan on the lake' one. And I did close my letter with 'hoping they all have a swell time on the beach'.



*House Norma stayed in when
going on vacation to Michigan City.
1036 E Michigan Blvd,
Michigan City, IN
An apartment home that contains
2,540 sq. ft. and was built in 1910.
It contains 4 bedrooms
and 4 bathrooms.
Year built: 1910*

I did get to see my family, except Charlie and Bill were out somewhere defending the country. Still, I felt lonely hanging around there. I was wishing I could get back on duty sooner, so I could get leave sooner and see Norma sooner. Oh well, I am now back in New York early and trying to learn what ship is next for me.

8/16/1943: Her letter that I received today, was written on July 29, just before she left for vacation. When I had gotten to Dad's house, I could have called her or taken the bus out to see her before she left. If I had been thinking. Her letter said it was raining and she felt lonely. I should write something to cheer her up. I will tell her how I am a swab jockey here at the so-called AGC barracks. I swab every morning and night. It keeps me busy. If you sleep here, they say, you clean here, we are not your mother. Sounds like Great Lakes again.

Being stuck inside so much, keeps me from having time to see the stars and remembering that time with her. I think I will use 'P.S. I Love You' on this letter. Oren has moved on to another ship already and he will never know.

8/19/1943: I got a letter from Norma and it was when she was just starting her vacation. I guess the letter I'm going to write, will get to her after she gets back home. I hope she got that suntan she wanted. Missing her on my leave really makes me miss her more than ever. I wonder if she feels the same way about me. I need to ask her for her phone number at SS Kresge. I hope she is allowed to use the phone at work for personal calls.

I am going to end the letter saying 'With All My Love, Raymond' as a closing. I wonder, if she even notices I change these around.

Several of us here at the AGC were told we need to have our seabag ready to depart at 0600 in the morning. Our ship is in Baltimore and we will be loaded on a bus to take us there. Yeah, a ship for me!

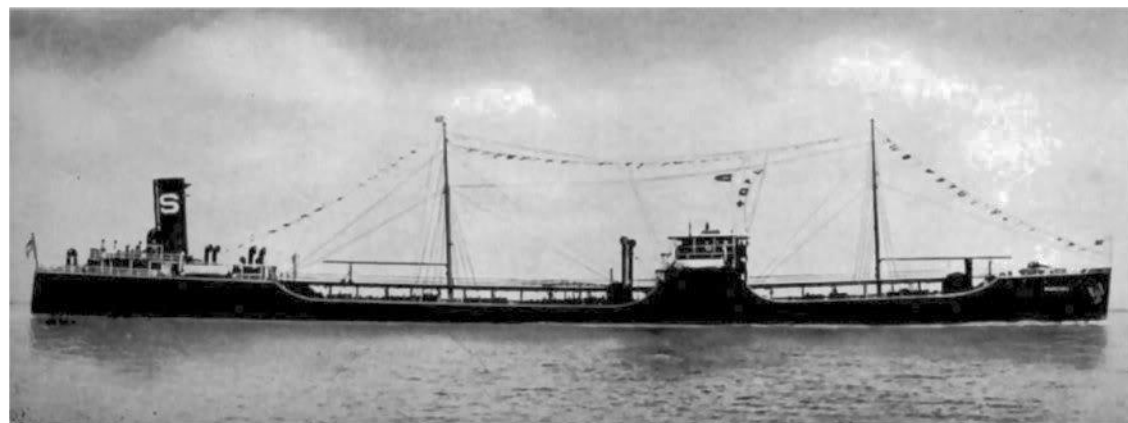
8/20/1943: The bus got us to the ship by 1100 hours. Ugh, this ship is a dirty old tanker with the smell of oil everywhere. It will take me forever just to get my quarters clean enough to live in for a trip. I need to send Norma my new address, with the **SS Mobilgas** as the ship.

I do hope Norma's vacation went swell, even if there were a lot of sailors around there on leave. I do miss her terribly! It was in late May that we were last together. I hope she doesn't mind, if I put her picture up on this dirty bulkhead, to look at every night. I wonder if she remembers in May, we didn't see many stars at her home. This was because she would always rush into the house when we got there. Maybe, she doesn't trust any sailor, including me, after dark.

The ship has been here in Baltimore, since late July, having its armaments modified. I was informed by Lt. Panaccion, my new AG commander, that five new 20 MM Mark-4 guns are to go with the 3 already aboard. One old 20 MM was removed as being inoperable.

There were also a 3" gun and 4" gun, already on the ship. I am familiar with operating these big guns. Parts onboard were various spare barrels, gun magazines (32), gun covers and boxes of other spare parts for all these guns.

***SS Mobilgas:
Under final construction in Quincy, Massachusetts
on December 3, 1938 before Launching on December 6th.***



Successful Sea Trials of Socony-Vacuum Tanker "MOBILGAS"

You would think after three other ships, I would know someone in this group of 17 AGs. But no, I will just have to make new friends.

8/22/1943: Our first trip out was a short one, from Baltimore to Hampton Rhodes, Virginia. Just overnight. The stars were beautiful as we cut through the water. And, I thought of her.

8/24/1943: We again are traveling at night. It was 2030 hour when we departed Hampton Rhodes in a tiny convoy of 3 ships and 3 escort vessels. It appears we are overprotected with that many escorts. I am still cleaning everything in my quarters plus each gun mount and its gun. I haven't been told what gun I am to be assigned. Personally, I do like the 3" better than the 4" gun.

8/25/1943: We joined with another convoy of 8 ships and an escort making 11 ships total, with 4 escorts. I'm not sure what the code is for this convoy. I didn't hear of it, if there is one. We are a small enough group; I can count the ships from the aft deck.

8/30/1943: I have cleaned everything. But it still looks dirty even after I have cleaned it. And the smell is still there. I am told by the ship's crew that after another week, I won't even notice. The scuttlebutt is we will be docking near Texas or Louisiana. Every ship still has its scuttlebutt 'communications'.

I need to write a letter to Norma so it is ready to mail when we hit port. The weather is swell and my tan is getting near perfect. I need to showoff and tell her how great it looks. I wonder if hers turned out as well on her vacation.

I really do miss her. It makes me sad to have not seen her on my leave. I'll just have to keep praying for her until we see each other again. Even though Oren is not on this ship, I still think of his comments about my closing line. This time I'm going up a level to 'With All My Love'

9/03/1943: We arrived at Port Arthur, Texas, on Wednesday the 1st. We had another 17 AGs put aboard today. Talk about a crowd in our sleeping quarters, it was one tight fit. But we are told they will be departing at the next port. We are just giving them a ride. I did get a telegram off to Norma yesterday, when I was mailing my letter to her. I liked the 'ever in my thoughts' part.

Telegram sent to Norma from Ray in Port Arthur, Texas.

STANDARD TIME INDICATED	Postal Telegraph Mackay Radio Commercial Cables All America Cables Canadian Pacific Telegraphs	THIS IS A FULL RATE TELEGRAM, CABLE-GRAM OR RADIOGRAM UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED BY SYMBOL IN THE PREAMBLE OR IN THE ADDRESS OF THE MESSAGE. SYMBOLS DESIGNATING SERVICE SELECTED ARE OUTLINED IN THE COMPANY'S TARIFFS ON HAND AT EACH OFFICE AND ON FILE WITH REGULATORY AUTHORITIES.
RECEIVED AT		
TELEPHONE YOUR TELEGRAMS TO POSTAL TELEGRAPH		

Form - J.CB369 C.DA363 D.HOA361 (TEN) 25 NL NL=PORARTHUR TEX 2
 MISS NORMA HEWITT SEP 2 PM 11 00
 CARE S. S. KRESGE 32 WEST FIFTH STREET (CINCINNATI OHIO)=

DEAR DARLING EVERYTHING FINE HOPE EVERYONE HOME OK
 MISS YOU TERRIBLY. YOU ARE MORE THAN EVER IN MY THOUGHTS AT
 THIS TIME. LOTS OF LOVE=
 RAY.

9/04/1943: We departed Port Arthur, today. It appeared we are alone, no other ships or escorts. No sooner had we began, then around mid-afternoon, we stopped and were anchoring near Galveston. Our Lieutenant tells us we're awaiting orders.

9/07/1943: Just before evening chow today, we pulled anchor. We were headed east in a convoy of 3 ships and 4 escorts. Again, more navy vessel protection than merchant ships. I guess, we have received our orders, after 3 days of sitting.

9/09/1943: As we moved by Southwest Pass, Louisiana, 12 ships joined our convoy. Our convoy now has a name, HK-129. With the added AGs on board, we are able to clean up this place, a little faster. Hopefully, we can get it reasonably clean, before we drop them off. We thanked them for their help.

9/11/1943: Early today, just after morning mess near Key West, I could see ships are going in all different directions.

I asked Lt. Panaccion what is happening. He said 11 ships and 4 escorts are detaching from our convoy and 8 other ships and four escorts are joining our convoy. But he says our convoy ID stops here. We now have become a new convoy, KN-264. How confusing.

9/13/1943: I guess I'll write a letter to Norma, since we are confined to quarters due to rough seas. I hope she can read my handwriting, with all this bouncing around. I keep looking for a letter from her, dated after my leave and her vacation. We expect to be in New York soon. So maybe, there will be some letters and I can mail one I'm going to write.

Yet, I miss her more than I miss the mail. I don't think I will like the way she is now putting her hair. Up high, if I understood what she wrote, earlier. I think I should say something, but maybe I shouldn't. I liked it the way it was.



Ray 2nd from the right, front row, next to Lt. Panaccion, on SS Mobilgas, September, 1943. Below, rest of Armed Guard Group aboard.



Olin Leake is second from the left, in the front row.

9/15/1943: Well, we are starting to have ships drop out of the convoy. I saw two ships detach, going towards Baltimore, as I stood my 2000 – 2400 watch. It was a clear and beautiful night. The stars shined like her eyes. I wonder, if she is thinking of me and looking at the same stars.

9/16/1943: A fellow AG, named Olin something, told me he saw 3 ships detach off the convoy on his 0800 – 1200 watch. He said, it looked to him, like they were heading towards Philadelphia. He seemed like a nice guy.

We were firing our guns, during our regular drill practice, this morning about 1000 hour. I was on the 3” gun which I am very familiar with, when it ‘Hanged-fire’! Hang-fire refers to an unexpected delay between the triggering of a firearm and the ignition of the powder within the shell.

The delay is usually too brief to be noticed, but can be several seconds or more. This is dangerous, as we don’t know **if** it will go off at all! So, I had to quickly, but carefully, extract the shell and immediately throw it overboard. I was glad it did not explode in my hands. Olin was glad as well since he was standing his watch not far from where I tossed it overboard.

9/17/1943: The **SS Mobilgas** has arrived in New York from Port Arthur, Texas. I think, I will have time to write to Norma. I need to confess to her; the last telegram was not from overseas but from Texas. If she only knew what I had to go through to send it in Texas, she would be amazed.

I must remember NOT to tell her about the misfired shell I dumped overboard. Don’t want her to think I have a dangerous job during this war!

I need to let her know I am in New York at present, but not for long. Next departure maybe keep me away from the states for 6 – 9 months. Don’t know how many ports we will hit, but I will try to get my letters out to her.

She wrote about her brother’s plans. Why would her brother want to be a Merchant Marine? Maybe, he is too young to get into the Navy and merchant ship captains, don’t care about your age.

And why does she need to know what my middle initial stands for? Anyway, I do hope my dreams of her and I will someday come true. Yet, I guess this might be too soon to say it out loud. I better get the letter written and sent today. We might leave out anytime and it might be a long time to the next mailing port.

Only 12 AGs got off and half of them were an Ensign and his communications group. Replacements came aboard. I guess, we gained a few guys overall.

9/19/1943: This ship moves around fast. We left New York late Friday night to get to New Jersey. They unloaded the Navy fuel, our cargo out of Texas. The smell is strong during these loading and unloading. We, AGs, try to stay up wind from the action.

This morning the **SS Mobilgas** departed Perth Amboy in a convoy of 29 ships and 4 escorts. When I looked at the night sky, we appear to be heading south.

9/20/1943: Four LCI boats joined the convoy today, just after we had dinner. I am told these Landing Craft Infantry (LCI) boats, are to be used to land large numbers of infantry and supplies directly onto beaches. They were interesting to look at, but seemed unable to cross the deep ocean water with its large waves in rough seas.



The Landing Craft Infantry (LCI) were several classes of seagoing amphibious assault ships of the Second World War used to land large numbers of infantry directly onto beaches.

9/26/1943: This morning the *SS Mobilgas*' Captain received permission from the commodore for us to detach from his convoy and travel independently. This means, we will be all alone. We would be without escort protection. I still remember the *SS Meriwether Lewis* being sunk, when it was a straggler, alone and behind the main convoy group. Everyone else, in this convoy, is continuing on to Guantanamo.

9/27/1943: The *SS Mobilgas* has gotten us safely to Aruba, just in time for evening chow. During our meal, John Gula, our radio guy, tells me there is 'No Room at the Inn'. His meaning is, we will have to wait for a loading berth.

The scuttlebutt is the bay area is too crowded and we will need to move out somewhere to wait our turn.

While the ship sits here, I need to write a letter to Norma. I truly miss her, more and more each day I am away. This is crazy as I have only known her for less than a year. I visited her only during a two-week liberty in May. But when I look at those stars, they remind me of the gleam in her eyes. I enjoy the night watches thinking of her. I have got to remember, not to say anything the censors might cut out. Then, she gets a letter full of holes. Every day that goes by means; the trip becomes shorter.

I wonder, if she writes to other sailors or boy-friends at the same time she is writing to me. Well, I will still tell Norma to keep writing to me and often, please.

I have a toothache and it is driving me NUTS!

9/28/1943: The scuttlebutt was right. We were sent over to Curacao to wait for a loading berth in Aruba. The movement of the ship shook me wide awake as I was slowly getting ready for breakfast.

9/30/1943: After two days, they found the *SS Mobilgas* a place to load. So, we departed Curacao for Aruba, arriving same day, as it is a short hop. I'll try to get my letters mailed here.

10/02/1943: I am glad the *SS Mobilgas* and I are departing Aruba. Yesterday evening and all day today, they were loading Navy Fuel. I had difficulty finding a place on the ship to avoid the smell. The scuttlebutt is we are heading for the Canal Zone. I looked back in my journal and found; I went through the Canal Zone in June of 1942 aboard the *SS Meriwether Lewis*.

I guess Charlie is right when he told me I would see a lot of the world, and the food was better in the Navy. But there is just not enough dessert at chow.

10/04/1943: We arrived at Cristobal. Within 3 hours, they had us heading into a lock, to begin our passage through the canal. I am glad I was on the 2000 – 2400 watch. I enjoyed seeing a lot of the movement through this canal. It was impressive the last time, going the other direction. I missed out on sleeping before my watch started, so I could watch as much of it as I could.

10/05/1943: We reached Balboa just at the end of my watch. Now we are off to I don't know, just somewhere in Asia, I hear. I was allowed to sleep until dinner because I stood watch. I ate a quick lunch and we did 'firing' practice all afternoon. Thankfully, no 'hang-fires' occurred.

We are traveling independently again, and it makes me nervous. Yes, a convoy would attract attention. Hopefully, finding this ship, traveling alone, would be like a needle in a haystack. But people do find needles at times! When traveling on the *SS Meriwether Lewis* in the Pacific, we were never found but I feel I am pushing my luck going a second time.

10/12/1943: My radio buddy, John Gula (what a name that is!), keeps me informed about what is happening around the ocean near our location. The Pacific is much more active than the Atlantic. He says, this is due to Japan being an island nation, like England, so their Navy is their strength. John is a smart guy. This is why he's the communications man.

The big news was about a week ago. Admiral Montgomery was shelling and bombing the 'Hell' out of Wake Island. John said, the Admiral had a very large fleet with every type of fighting vessel possible.

Unfortunately, we heard closer to our possible destination, the destroyer **USS Henley** was sunk. The attack by a Japanese submarine was off the coast of eastern New Guinea, near Australia. Australia is where the scuttlebutt says we are headed.

10/19/1943: We do our daily drills and at times, we fire our guns for practice. We don't want to use too much ammunition. But we need to stay proficient says Harry Keltz, our coxswain. **If** we were in a convoy, we could only fire either starboard or port, depending on where in the convoy we are located. If we are on the inside, we would radio to nearby ships to trade for an outside spot, letting them take the inside. Our ship captain would prefer staying inside, as being the safer spot. But when our Lieutenant says move to the outside, the merchant ship captain moves to the outside. Unfortunately, or fortunately, we are traveling independently. We can fire in any direction we choose.

10/21/1943: Here I go with magically gaining a day again. I will just stick to what John says he is using for his radio messages. Ship's time, I'm sure. When I was on the 1600 – 2000 watch, they did the King Neptune court on the 'Wogs' in our group. My stomach still got a little queasy from watching.

10/26/1943: During drills, I have no problem operating my 3" gun and if need be, moving to the 4" gun, it would be the same. The AGs on the 20 MM guns were less successful. They are having a difficult time preventing their guns from jamming. Keltz ask me to read through the manual and see what I might think was the issue.

I am one of three GM3c on board. The rest of the AGs are S1c at best and none had any long experience on the 20 MM. I did agree with them about there being only five parts to break on the gun. They said those parts had all been replaced, more than once. So, I with the other gunner's mates, LaRiche and Szatkowski, got with the stern 20 MM gun crew. We wanted to see, what we could learn about, what was happening.

10/31/1943: John says we are only a few days out of port. Since today is a 'Sunday schedule', I have time to write the family and mail it. I will try to write Norma, as well. I hope, all my moving around the world is the reason I haven't gotten any letters from her.

Also, I hope she knows, I can't mail her a letter in the middle of the ocean. I think I can at least say 'I am in the South Pacific' and the censors won't mind. Maybe, I can hint to her, if she remembers where I told her I wanted to go after the war is over.

I do miss her very much! It gets worse as the days go by. Still, each passing day is closer to the end of this voyage. I hope, I can find words to describe how I really feel about her. But, writing it in a letter seems less meaningful than face to face. If I write for too long, I will begin to get homesick and depressed. So, I need to stay on other topics when writing. Such as 'how's your parents' or 'tell Rita and the gang 'Hi' and 'not work too hard'. Writing in this journal helps me organize my thoughts before starting on her letters.



Picture received by Ray 11/03/1943, Norma with the uppity HAIR style.

11/03/1943: The **SS Mobilgas** has gotten us safely to Sydney, Australia, in a one boat convoy, all by ourselves, late yesterday. But, not too late for mail delivery. Wow, what a delivery! I got 7 letters from Norma and some from Marie. And the picture she sent is great. I will write her after chow tonight. Maybe, I can get it mailed before we leave Sydney.

Her new picture just makes me want to go into Tokyo and beat up all the enemy to end this war. Do I need to tell her, I was not in Louisiana? Postmarks can be anywhere the military mail happens to move through, especially when I am overseas. She bragged in her letter about her tan. Maybe, I will challenge her next time I am home, to see who has a better tan.

And what is this she says in her letter, about 'Coats of Navy Blue'? Those officers can't be trusted any more than us enlisted sailors. Anyway, I better stop looking at the new picture or I'll never get the letter started to be mailed in time.

11/04/1943: The *SS Mobilgas* departed Sydney after chow late yesterday, independently again, but I am not too concern. There was a 1-day delay, due to awaiting naval orders. Then we met, a little up the coast, with a Torres Straits pilot who will guide us. So hopefully, the area around Australia has been secured from enemy subs.

11/07/1943: The *SS Mobilgas* arrived in Townsville, but we departed there quickly. Seems the convoy we are supposed to be in, has already gotten underway.

11/08/1943: We, the *SS Mobilgas*, joined up early this morning with the convoy, TN-176 of some 20 ships and 5 escorts, going to New Guinea, according to the scuttlebutt. When I was on the 0800 – 1200 watch, I could see a nearby British merchant ship called the *SS Admiral Chase*. They had the same 20 MM guns we had onboard.



NH 89812 S.S. ADMIRAL CHASE (British Merchant Freighter)

When they moved to a spot on the outside edge of the convoy, for firing drill, I was watching. They did not seem to be having any issues firing those 20 MM guns.

I asked John if he could radio over to them. I said, ask them how to they keep their 20 MM guns from jamming. He said he would try. I ask Olin to stay with John to bring back the answer as soon as possible to me.

Later, Olin rushed up to me and said you won't believe their answer. Olin learned from John that the 'Aussies', to use a nice word, at first just laughed. Then they asked, how us dumb yanks got across the Pacific without being able to fend off the enemy with our 20 MM guns not working. After more laughter, John told Olin, they said it needed lubricating! 'And not the gun itself, you dumb yanks, but the shell magazines! Here in the Pacific with long voyages and high humidity, the magazines don't slide the shells into the breech as easy. So, lube away!'

11/10/1943: Well, their answer on the 20 MM gun problem made sense. We did lube away and it worked. Even with the 'dumb' comments, they helped us. Later, I asked John to tell them thanks. Olin and I did seem to make the Lieutenant happy. So happy he gave me a cigar, when he lost to me at cards.



Lt. Panaccion giving Raymond a Cigar for winning a card game.

11/11/1943: After keeping us on the move, the *SS Mobilgas* arrived at Milne Bay in New Guinea. I am glad we finished dinner, just in time to go hide from the smell. They discharged about 2/3rds of the Navy fuel. I know we need it to run the war, but it does truly stink as well.

11/14/1943: We departed Milne Bay with one PC escort, since we are only going up the coast around the North side of the island. A short hop to us.

I did get word, by John, of a troop ship, freighter *SS Cape San Juan*, being torpedoed as it was going to Townsville. The ship was carrying more than 1300 troops but John didn't know how many survived, if any. Sad event and close by.

11/15/1943: We arrived at Porlock Harbor, New Guinea. Again, they discharged the remaining cargo right at lunch. Olin and I could hardly keep our food down.

11/16/1943: Finally, the fuel cargo is fully discharged! We are getting out of Porlock Harbor, with one escort.

11/17/1943: Our escort leaves us! Therefore, we are again traveling independently, with zig-zag instructions at 13 knots average. This time though, we are traveling farther south, as we go eastward towards the Canal Zone. This was because of the fighting in the Solomon Islands, according to Lieutenant Panaccion. I am sure, the troop ship sinking was a factor as well.

There is a large Allied force trying to drive the Japs out of those islands. The fighting is so intense, we can see on the horizon smoke rising skyward. Occasionally, one with good hearing and eyesight, will sight a plane in that direction. But I need to get back and finish all those letters I got in Sydney. Still, every minute it seems, we run drills because of the enemy being so close.

11/25 or 24/1943: Another Thanksgiving aboard ship. Let's see, this makes the third one for me. The food was better than the *USS Crosby* but not as nice as the *SS Collis P. Huntington* had for us. I remember having our own mess room for the AGs and dessert was great on that ship. My biggest complaint on this ship, there was no dessert.

I did ask if we are going to cross over the date-line, lose a day and have Thanksgiving again tomorrow? Everyone laughed except the cooks.

11/26/1942: We didn't get that second 'Thanksgiving' meal.

12/02/1943: Once we left the islands, the trip has been uneventful. Not much for me to write. We did stay very busy, which I like. I must have cleaned all eight 20 MM guns onboard. I, also, reminded everyone about lubing those magazines to prevent jamming.

I have to get back to writing a letter to everyone back home. I heard; we will hit the Canal Zone by mid-month. I think, Lieutenant Panaccion was happy with my efforts on the gun jamming, because I am now assigned to the 20 MM gun on the bow. I am going to miss my old 3" big gun.

12/07/1943: Today is 2 years, since Pearl Harbor. We had silence for 30 minutes this morning, to remember why we are in this war and on this ship. Truly, it will be a day that will live in 'infamy' as the President said.

12/12/1943: I have to get these letters done before we hit port. I haven't even finished reading all of her letters, I got back in Australia. I'll just tell Norma I can't say much because of the censors. If I write about how much I love her and thinking about her, I would run out of paper. I only have a few sheets left.

I'll have this and the other letters, ready to mail when we hit port. Who knows, might even be mail for me there. Since it is close to Christmas, I need to wish for her to have the merriest! I am sticking to 'With All my Love' and Olin likes it, too. Yet, he says, one's first love will always break your heart, when they say 'Goodbye'.

Oh, I just found a present from Norma in my bag of mail, I had gotten in Sydney. It is nice. I'm going to open back up my letter to add a P.S. about the gift.

Oh no again, I am just reading this other letter from Norma. It is about her, her Dad, her sister and Rita, being in a car accident back on October 19th. And here, I just wished her the best of health in my letter. Ugh, need to open my letter again. I'll add more to the P.S. part.

Newspaper Article on the accident.

**Truck And Automobile Collide,
Hurling Car Against One
Parked On Roadside.**

Five persons were injured, two of them seriously, when a truck and an automobile met head-on last night on Camargo Pike near Madeira, throwing the passenger car against another which was parked by the roadside while its driver repaired a tire.

The injured:

Harry Hewitt, 58 years old, Loveland Pike and Kugler Mill Road, possible internal chest injuries and cuts on knee; his daughters, Norma, 23, cut on left arm and leg, and Gloria, 18, possible skull fracture and crushed chest; Rita Bergen, 22, 7860 Euclid Avenue, Madeira, face cuts, and William Gillespie, 19, 3815 Waterson Avenue, Fairfax, right hand and right hip injuries.

Deputy Sheriffs J. A. McDonough and Elmer Bowersox, who investigated the accident with Indian Hill Rangers and Madeira police, said the crash occurred when the heavy truck, belonging to the Ferguson Moving Company and driven by Larry Thomas, 51, Camp Denison, collided with Hewitt's car on the narrow highway.

Officers said the impact drove Hewitt's car into the side of that of Gillespie, which was parked at the roadside as Gillespie changed a tire. Miss Bergen was riding with Hewitt and his daughters.

Hewitt and Miss Bergen were taken to Bethesda Hospital. The other victims were treated at Our Lady of Mercy Hospital, Mariemont.

The condition of Hewitt and Gloria Hewitt was described as serious.

We are now close enough to the port, to pick up their radio signals. They are playing "All I Need Is You". And I really do need her. Gosh, adding more to the P.S.

The P.S. is now as long as the letter part.

12/14/1943: We have now arrived at Balboa, south end of the Canal Zone. The scuttlebutt around is about the battleship, *USS Oklahoma*, sunk on December 7, 1941 by Jap aircraft. The word is, the ship was refloated at Pearl Harbor. Yeah, hurrah and what an effort that must have been. Good to hear it, though.

12/17/1943: Again, they began loading the stinking Navy fuel, but at least it was after chow. Looks like we are headed back west, towards the fighting. We are traveling independently with zig-zag instructions at 12 knots average. I am standing watch tonight, at 2000 – 2400 hours, my favorite time.

Scuttlebutt is we are heading for a place called Herbrides or Hebrews or something like that. They say, we passed these islands when we went south, to keep away from the fighting around the Solomon Islands. I wonder how that fight is going.

12/28/1943: Not much to write here. Weather is warm. Definitely not Holiday weather. Christmas dinner was okay, turkey with all the trimmings. It just wasn't festive, I guess. Not having family around gives everyone on board a homesick feeling, including me. It has been three years, back on December 23rd, since mom passed away. I still miss her. Sure, would enjoy spending time with Norma, next Christmas.

I don't know when we will be at a port to send mail out, but I am thinking of her so much, it helps to keep writing her. I hope her Christmas was better than mine. It helps me to forget my loneliness, by thinking of the swell times we have had together on that one liberty. I don't know why she thinks I have redheads in every port. I am barely in any port long enough to meet any girl, redhead or blonde!

Olin just hollered, there is a sink tub available, so I can go wash my clothes. Aah, duty calls.

1/01/1944: Well, I got through New Year's Eve without anyone noticing, it was my birthday! That's one good thing about no one rolling over from the *SS Collis P. Huntington* with me. But then again, I do miss those guys! They were like my Navy family, away from my Cincy ones. So, now I am 22, traveling on a ship loaded with fiery fuel, towards places where the fighting is raging in the Pacific. Of course, there is the date-line issue again. I am glad. Maybe we can celebrate New Year's twice!

1/07/1944: It's Friday, and still not much to write in this journal! I did make sure, the guys remembered about lubricating those shell magazines.

I stand my night watches with lots of pleasure. I would watch the stars in the sky, thinking she might be watching them as well. But of course, Olin reminded me, our nights were their days and ruined it for me. Anyway, I will still think of her when seeing the stars!

1/08/1944: Still not much to write but I have thought of things to write to my sweetheart. Whenever we get together in the mess, any subject can be brought up for discussion. Tonight, everyone was talking about how a sailor should act in the presence of other people, meaning civilians. I said a sailor should act onboard as proper as he would among others. A good person always. They all thought I was joking and laughed. The group is really a bunch of great guys, even Olin.

I would guess the Christmas rush at SS Kresges is over and I'm sure Norma is happy about it. I will start on a letter to her. I miss her and love her more and more each passing day. May God bless her. I hope I am included as part of her blessings package from above.

1/11/1944: The *SS Mobilgas* was met today, by an escort to assist our entry into the port of Espirtu Santo, New Hebrides (it's an Island chain, northeast of Australia). My goodness, the scuttlebutt was right!

It appears we are sliding alongside a ship, instead of getting a berth at the dock. Must be crowded. We will have to wait our turn. It took us almost a month to get here from the Canal.

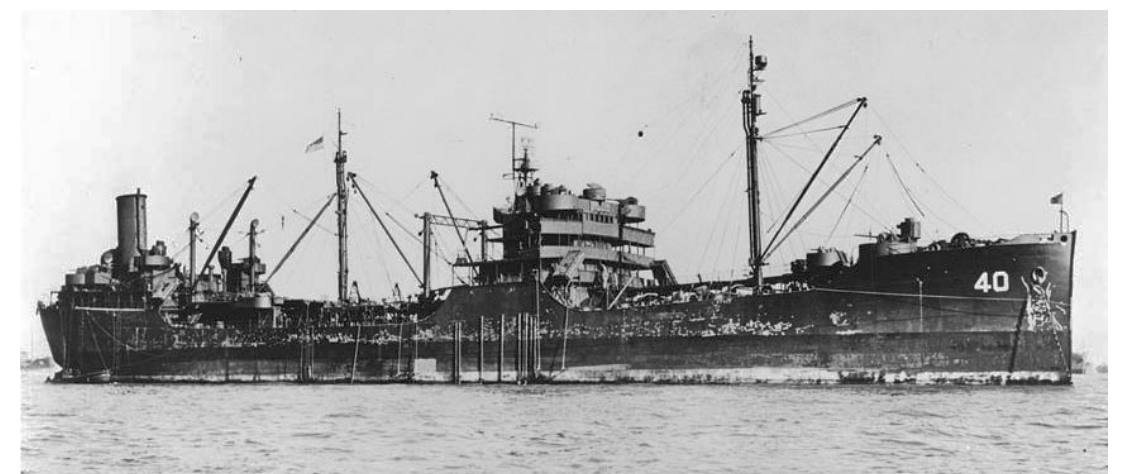


Landing Ship, Tank (LST), or tank landing ship, is the naval designation for ships first developed during World War II to support amphibious operations by carrying tanks, vehicles, cargo, and landing troops - directly onto shore with no docks or piers.

Of course, the first local news from our radio guy, John Gula, was about two destroyers, *USS Smith* and *USS Hutchins*, being damaged. They collided off the coast of eastern New Guinea. Those were the islands we visited last trip. That's where we learned how to keep the 20 MM guns from jamming.

Also, John told us there was a landing ship, *LST-446*, damaged by an accidental explosion in the Solomon Islands. Again, nearby. Sure hope, I don't have to serve on one of those tiny ships!

1/12/1944: Surprise, surprise! We discharged some of the fuel cargo directly onto the *USS Lackawanna*, sitting next to us! Unfortunately, their hoses are smaller. I'm told it will take 14 hours. There goes a good meal or two, with the stinking fuel ruining the flavor. Relax Ray, it's for the war you know!



USS Lackawanna (AO-40), Ship fueled by SS Mobilgas when in the Pacific at Espirtu Santo, New Hebrides.

I wonder, if the mail will find us here or at least, maybe, I can mail this stack of letters for my family and my girl!

1/13/1944: I later learned; we didn't unload all the fuel onto the *USS Lackawanna*. But the *SS Mobilgas* finally gets to move into berth #34.

Again, unloading onto a ship, in the next berth to us. Happily, they did discharge all remaining fuel cargo onto the *USS Cache*. Future meals should now taste better.

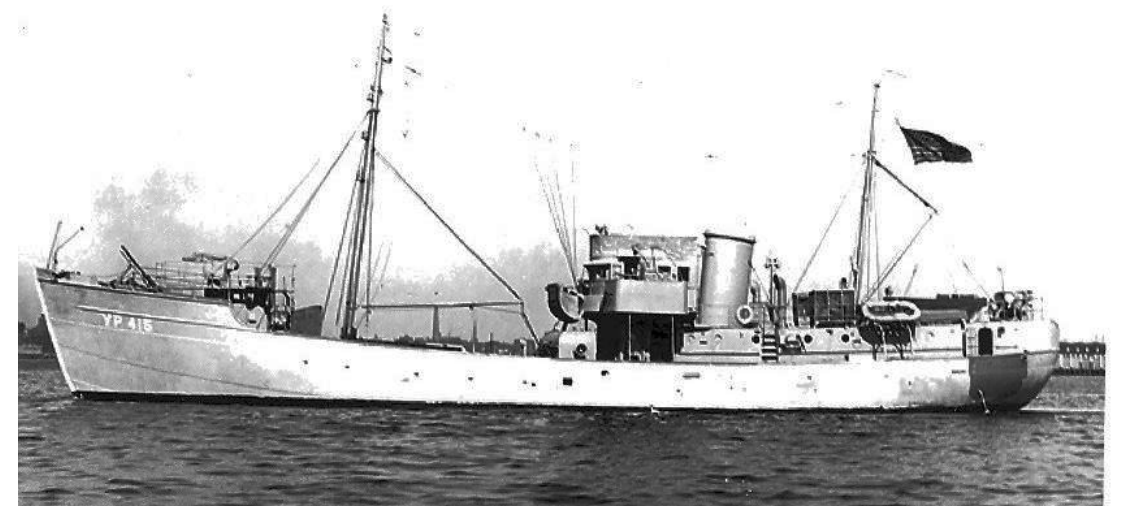


USS Cache (AO-67) a Type T2-SE-A1, Suamico-class, fleet oiler. From 7- 8-1943, she operated between Espiritu Santo and Guadalcanal until 4th of August. Duty as a station tanker at Efate and Espiritu Santo continued into December 1943, where she sailed from, to refuel ships at sea.

1/14/1944: I will need to write quickly, because we aren't staying here long, I'm told. I was disappointed, there was no mail for me at this stop. I guess the mailman had his gasoline rationed and couldn't get to us.

I do want to let her know; she is 'more than ever in my thoughts'. Still, I am a long way from having enough time to get home, to see her on a liberty and get back. Much too far from home.

1/15/1944: Right as we were eating lunch, the ship departs Espirtu Santo, New Hebrides with a 'YP416' as our escort. At least, our ship has some protection besides just us. I did mail off a letter to Norma, just before we left out.



This YP-415 is a twin to the YP-416. The designation YP originally meant a yard patrol craft. At first, they were mostly obtained by the acquisition and conversion of private yachts or fishing vessels.

1/16/1944: Well, I guess I spoke too soon! Our escort departed today. We are instructed to travel independently. On our own again! Alone! Guess I will sit and write a letter to Norma, after drills and gun cleaning have been done.

1/21/1944: Well, it has been a week since I wrote in this journal. There has been nothing new to say. Everyone still responds when we hear the different alarms. This keeps us sharp on knowing, which alarm is which. I am always disassembling, cleaning and re-assembling every gun we have. I do occasionally play some basketball onboard. I still enjoy the night watches, thinking about her, even if she has daylight at the same time. Wish Olin hadn't told me about that fact.

1/28/1944: Another Friday. Again, nothing but smooth sailing, cleaning and cleaning. I still hate to wash my clothes but I am enjoying the great weather. I bet my dad, the sisters and Norma are likely getting cold weather. Maybe even snow. I don't miss that! I do miss Norma and the family. I wonder how Pop is doing. It's been over three years since Mom passed away. I don't even want to guess the day. Is this 28th date the time before or after we lose a day?

2/04/1944: Another, another Friday! Guess I'll get a letter started to Norma. I had finished one for Marie, yesterday. It shouldn't be long until we reach the canal. Then maybe, a repeat loading of fuel, and back to the Australian area.

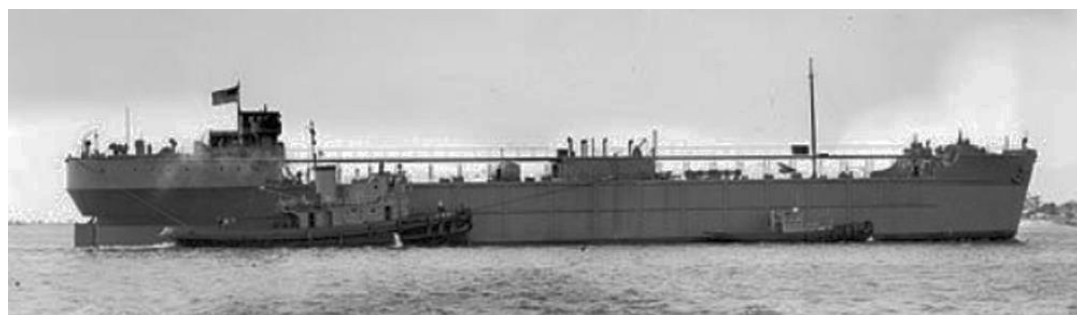
I need to ask if her, her Dad and the others, are okay after the car accident back in October. Also, let her know it is not me being slow in writing to her. It's the mail service. I think, we only get mail call about once every two months or longer. I do miss her terribly! I wish Hitler would go to HELL! I better not say that in her letter. I wouldn't want her to think I talk like a sailor.

Anyway, if I get this letter written, it can be censored before the next port. Then, it will get mailed it right away. Let's see, I'll say 'love and kisses until your wandering boy returns home'. Got to change things up to keep her on her toes! I was using "With all my love" last few months.

2/09/1944: We have arrived, outside of Balboa in the Canal Zone, this morning just after I got off the 2000 to 2400 watch. I get to stand watch again this evening, so I will get to enjoy the view as we pass through the locks, again. We will reach Cristobal on the Atlantic side at the end of my watch.

2/10/1944: We left out of Cristobal, just after loading bunker fuel and water for the ship itself. It was just after dinner and I was told we are headed for South America.

Later, our radioman, John, had informed us of some chatter he had heard. It seems, on the same day we left Espiritu Santo, a fuel oil barge **YO-159** under tow by the **SS GulfStar**, was torpedoed by a Jap submarine within 205 miles of there. The damage was so bad, it was scuttled by gunfire from the submarine chaser, **USS PC-1138**. Scuttle means to sink it, so the enemy is unable to make use of it.



USS YO-159 was torpedoed on 13 January 1944 and subsequently scuttled by USS PC-1138.



Photo of the USS PC-815, a US PC-461 class submarine chaser that served in World War II, and is identical to the USS PC-1138 another PC-461.

2/11/1944: After about 24 hours, we reached Covenas, Columbia. This is my second time actually being to South America, but again, I will have no time for a shore visit. No mail arrived for me, but I did send my letters off. They began loading crude oil and bunker fuel just as I started to eat evening chow.

The odor made my stomach less than happy, so I passed on getting seconds.

2/12/1944: The loading at the dock was completed by the morning meal. Our ship was instructed to move to the sea-line to top off tanks.

2/14/1944: Yesterday, we sat in the bay awaiting orders. We got underway just after I started my watch duty at 2000 hours. Good-bye Covenas, Columbia.

I do wish I was home to give my sweet heart a sweet kiss on this Valentine's Day. It has been a year since I wrote my first letter to her. With that one May visit, she has changed my life completely!

2/18/1944: We continue drilling, cleaning and firing our guns to stay in top shape. To keep our aim accurate. The scuttlebutt is we are heading to the states and from the look of the sky at night, I would agree. Maybe, some leave will be possible. I have only really visited with her once in May, last year. I am not counting the Christmas we first met for lunch with Florence.

That May visit, it was perfect. She is so sweet! On my last leave in August, I just missed her as she left for vacation to her favorite beach on Lake Michigan. But that one long visit in May was enough to tell me she's the one. It might be my first love, but Olin is wrong about her breaking my heart someday.

2/22/1944: The *SS Mobilgas* delivered us to Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania, late last night. The view this morning was of chemical plants, like we have in Cincy. I was told, we are just down the river from Philadelphia. Across the river, I see New Jersey, similar to seeing Kentucky from Cincy.

We didn't stay long sitting near Marcus Hook. Just after breakfast, the ship moved more up river towards the Jersey side. The place was called Paulsboro. It took us about 2 hours to maneuver around all the ship traffic. I enjoyed the short trip.

2/23/1944: Well, I am being detached from duty aboard the *SS Mobilgas* and assigned to the Port Director, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Looks like the whole AG crew is being taken off. I saw another group waiting to board. Then, before we leave the dock area, they bus us to the train station. We are heading to the AGC in Brooklyn, New York for 'leave' authorization. I hope, it will be long enough to go home and that she has not gone somewhere on vacation.

2/24/1944: I am on leave until March 5th. I called Marie, to let her know I'm coming home on the train. I will leave my seabag and journal in a locker, here at the AGC. I need to take some civilian clothes in a bag to wear when I get home. It will be lighter than that seabag! Ten days is fast, but enough time to see Norma's beautiful face!

3/06/1944: I made it back to the AGC in Brooklyn late last night and found my stuff in the locker, just as I left it. Today, I sent Norma a telegram, telling her I got here safely and closing the message with I-

"MISS YOU TERRIBLY. YOU ARE MORE THAN EVERYTHING IN MY THOUGHTS AT THIS TIME. LOVE RAY"

I used 'Ray' instead of 'Raymond' because I was paying by the letter. I wonder, if she'll notice? It was a swell visit and we had a great time together. I still remember my phone call to her when I first got home. Her voice was so sweet to hear.

3/07/1944: It has been a busy day. I have been assigned to detach duty aboard the *SS Thomas Scott*. The good part is my CO, Lt Panaccion, rolled to the *SS Thomas Scott* with me. Nice to know I won't have to train a new commander.

Also, rolling with me are Olin Leake (nice guy, gives advice on women), Eugene O'Reilly (wants to be called Joe, his middle name is Joseph) and Stacy (his first name is Earful or Earsel or something like that, so we all call him by his last name). So at least, I know a couple of the guys.

I tried to phone Norma from the AGC before boarding the ship, but some guy answered at her house. He acted like he was a sailor or some type military. Maybe, that was her brother or cousin fooling around with me. Didn't get to talk to her though. I hope she doesn't have other boyfriends besides me.

There is no time to waste. The ship docked here from Liverpool on March 2nd and we are leaving out in the morning. I better get off a letter to Norma, so it can be mailed before leaving New York. I want her to know how special the past week with her has been.

And, now I get this funny feeling in the pit of my stomach. Is this how 'love' feels? I forgot to get a picture from her, so I need to ask for one. Also, I must have left my address book around the AGC, because it wasn't in my seabag. I remember Norma's address and Marie's by heart, but I'll need to ask for Rita's, to have just in case.



SS Thomas Scott, Ray was assigned to serve upon in March. This was his ship during D-Day, June 1944. Through most of 1944, the ship, on a weekly basis, ferried supplies of army vehicles, gasoline, water and troops, to the beaches of Omaha and Utah in France.

3/09/1944: We have reached Baltimore. I loaded ammunition for 7 hours. That was work. I am tired, but I need to write a short letter to Norma about the address change to the **SS Thomas Scott**, to get her letters. I hope her cold is better. I gave her a ring, nothing like an engagement ring or anything, just a nice ring. She said it was too small.

If she made her finger smaller, she wouldn't lose it. Ha-ha. I wonder how she'll wear it though. I get homesick every time I try to write to her. I miss her playing with my ear when we sit together, too.

I'll end with XXXXXXs to number 50. I hope she remembers what that means!

3/10/1944: We are sitting here at Baltimore to learn our next movement. Some of the merchant crew (the guys who work the ship) are telling us what a horrible trip they had out and about Murmansk, the last few months. They said before New Year's, the Murmansk port had an enemy air raid. The **SS Thomas Scott** Armed Guard were at their battle stations, to help the shore batteries run the planes off. There were four or five more air raids, all through January. One German plane was shot down.

The crew continued telling us how, when they left out of Murmansk in early February, the attacks didn't stop. There were several attempts, by a Junker 88 fighter bomber, at attacking the convoy. None were successful.

Those merchants gave high praise to their Armed Guard guys for keeping the planes away. The AGs even dropped depth charges for a couple hours, when an escort reported hearing submarine sounds. When the flares went up, the AGs went to battle stations looking for the surface raiders, indicated by the flare signals.

Everyone stayed stressed, until reaching Liverpool.



A Junker 88A

I wonder, if we will see such action. The war has been getting more active with more attacks every day, it seems.

Yet, I do have my sweet girl to think about, instead of dwelling on the war.

3/12/1944: Today is a great day! The mail found me, sitting in Baltimore, and 3 letters were from Norma! We expect to be here a few days, so I will try to write to her. Every day brings me closer to when I can see her again.

In her letter, it sounds like someone, probably Rita, is trying take her on some 'blind dates' with a sailor. I hope, she keeps refusing to go. Also, she did send a picture of herself.

I now have three. Fur coat, uppity hair and now the beach one, in her bathing suit. She wrote on the back of the picture saying '*hold this one far away, it looks better that way*'. It's a picture from her August trip, when I came home and she was in Michigan City. I need to get a good picture of me to send her.



Above, Norma's 8-1943 picture at Michigan City, Indiana sent to Ray 3-1944.

These pictures just remind me of the swell time I had on leave. I need to let her know; I might be out on ship duty for six months. But then, I just as likely might be back sooner. She teases me about redheads. She needs to know I only prefer one sweet and adorable brunette, her.

Oh, it's late! I need to get writing or I won't be done until maybe 2 AM. And, I need to get up at 7 AM. I'll send that poem I found in the paper about the stars. It says things, I wish I could say, to her. Great way to end this letter, too.

Counting the stars

I try to count the stars at night Before I go to sleep
I find it is much easier Than adding up the sheep
Because when I behold the stars Across the Heaven Blue
I see their silver sparkle and I always think of you
And when I think of you, my love. . . . I think of other things
Especially the happiness. . . . That being with you brings
I ponder over memories. . . . And all the days ahead
The passing of the weather and. . . . The words your letter said
And soon the sun is up again. . . . And I awake to find
I fell asleep in dreams of you. . . . And left the stars behind.

Poem from a newspaper. Ray rewrote it in his 3/12/1944 letter to Norma.

3/13/1944: Long day of cleaning guns, clothes and waiting on orders. I did learn there have been some war materials loaded, hidden in crates, so they can stack in the cargo hold. I guess I will write another letter because I'm always thinking of her. I send each one I write, the very next day, since I don't know when we are moving out.

Yesterday's letter was very long, so I will keep this one short, so I will have time to write Marie. Problem I'm having is I can only think of our six days together and not anything to write that's new. But I really did enjoy being with her the whole time.

Oh, Easter is soon, so I can say 'Happy Easter'. Maybe, I need to remind her that the ship's name has changed. These letters will stop at any time we get our orders. Now, what do I write to Marie? Happy Easter and ask how the family is doing, I guess.

3/20/1944: Still no word on when, we are moving out of Baltimore. Wouldn't be so bad, if we were permitted shore leave. Also, I am out of the paper with the header showing the AGC in Brooklyn. Oh well, I will use these little, note papers. Did I say 'Happy Easter in that last letter? I don't remember but it won't hurt to say it again.

I wonder, if she got snow like we did here, last night. They had to stop loading ships, due to the snow. Other than having a little heartache when I look at her picture, I guess I am healthy as always.

3/21/1944: We haven't had mail for several days. I don't think the mail guys know; we are still here in Baltimore. Lt. Panaccion sent Olin ashore to see what the problem might be with the mail delivery. He took all our letters needing to be sent. I just hope he comes back with mail for us. I better start on a short letter to Norma, as it is getting late. The snow did not stop us, from loading ammunition all day.

3/22/1944: Thanks to Lt Panaccion and Olin. He was able to find some mail for the ship. I got 4 letters from my Darling! Today, it is cold but raining cats and dogs.

But I am happy. Well until I saw that someone told Norma I was a 'two-timer', because I was a sailor. It would hurt my feelings if she really believes that. Maybe I should remind her about when I tried to call her from NY and a sailor answered her phone! No, that might seem mean. I truly believe, I am her only guy!

3/25/1944: STILL, sitting in Baltimore, waiting orders. Guess, I could write a short note to Norma. Stacy stood watch last night. He said the dock areas seem to be busier than usual. He thinks things are beginning to happen. The scuttlebutt still remains quiet about any orders. If Stacy is right, I better finish her a letter and get it mailed.

3/27/1944: We are moving, we are moving! The *SS Thomas Scott* is finally departing Baltimore. And we are loaded with cargo of general items, grain and 2400 tons of explosives. We must not be going far because we are traveling by ourselves.

3/28/1944: Stacy says his friend, Bill Reed in communications, told him there was a mishap in Bayonne, off shore from the Naval Supply Depot. So, we aren't going there. Seems the incident was a tug accidentally rammed an Oiler ship named *Salamonie* or Salmon or something like it. This is across from Brooklyn where we would normally dock.



USS Salamonie (AO-26) was a Cimarron-class fleet replenishment oiler, named for the Salamonie River in Indiana. Gash is visible.

While we cruise up the coast to New York, I have time to write my girl. She thinks I have redheads in New York, but I don't have any girlfriends but her. I can't write for long, because I need to sleep before my 2400 – 0400 watch. Love that duty, watching the night sky.

3/29/1944: We got to New York not long after my watch, but we stayed out at anchorage. If we don't dock, I will need to catch the mail boat to get my letter sent. They call this area, Graves End Bay. I hope this doesn't mean a lot of ships sink around here.

3/30/1944: We are still sitting out here in the 'Graves', but the mail boat found us. I got mail from Marie and two letters from Norma. That makes 9 letters since arriving at Baltimore in early March. Wow! Reminds me about the steak I ate for supper tonight. It was also, the first we had since leaving NY for Baltimore. It just melted in my mouth. Need to remind her about sending her Easter picture. I bet she looked lovely as always.

The weather is cold and nasty. Maybe, it is why we keep sitting out here. These two letters I got from her, didn't have the ship's name on it! Maybe why they took long to find me. Got to reminder her about the ship's name in the address.

She's the sweetest and nicest girl, I ever met, I wonder, if she would scrub my clothes to get the grease out. If not, I can always get one of those redheads she teases me about, to do my laundry. Ha-ha-ha. Well, I better get the letter wrote, since it is late and I need my sleep.

4/3/1944: It's Monday, we are still sitting at the 'Graves'. Yesterday was 'Palm Sunday'. Today is a nice day, for early April in NY. It was even nicer when the mail arrived with five letters from my girlfriend and one from Marie. I better get a letter off to them. The scuttlebutt word and Stacy's communications guy, both say we will be moving soon. The anchorage area is also getting crowded with ships, as well.

Thinking ahead, I hope when I get back, there will be a few days of leave. The AGC is saying, I would get 15 days leave only, after I do ten months duty aboard a ship. I don't know how long this trip will be, but maybe I will get the two weeks leave upon returning. Seems like a long time before I can hold her in my arms. But it will give me something to look forward to, on every night watch I do! I better get to writing and send this, if we are to really about to move out of here.

4/5/1944: The *SS Thomas Scott* finally departs from Graves End Bay. So, we didn't die here at 'Graves'. The convoy seems huge, maybe 60-70 ships. I even see some escort vessels. We are heading northeast, so that seems to indicate, we are going to Europe. There won't be any mail now, for a while.

4/8/1944: Lt. Panaccion is having us checkout all our gun covers, due to the weather. Drills had been run most of the day, every day, but no firing practice. When we were passing Halifax, Stacy said Bill reported nineteen more ships joined our convoy, called HX-286, during the day. Tomorrow will be Easter. I hope that's a good sign for our voyage.

4/10/1944: Bill, Stacy's guy in communications, continues to keep us up on the convoy's activity. He told us nine escorts join our convoy during the day. Big things must be happening. I don't remember being in such a large group of ships.

We did report to Lt. Panaccion on our gun inspections. The shell magazine hatch covers for the three-inch and four-inch guns needed new gaskets, to keep water out. And if he could get us some gasket material, for the doors of our gun gear and locker storage, we would be very thankful.



Thelma Bergen, Gloria Hewitt (Norma's sister), Rita Bergen and Norma Hewitt. Taken April 7, 1944 in front of the SS Kresges where they worked except for Gloria. Do not know whose Navy hat Norma is wearing.

4/20/1944: About mid-afternoon, the *SS Thomas Scott* brought us to a place known as Gourock, Scotland, which is downstream from Glasgow. We didn't stop there, but continued up river towards Glasgow.

4/21/1944: We arrived at Glasgow docks, about mid-afternoon, today. It's Friday and I have time to write a letter to my girl. I can't tell her where I am, but maybe, if I remind her of the handkerchief, I got her last year, she'll know where I am.

With all the activity happening, I wonder, if my brother Charlie is nearby. Maybe, if I get ashore, the Red Cross could help me find him.

I wonder if Olin will let me have some of his bigger paper, to write Norma today. It has been only 2 months but I miss her terribly. I think of her constantly.

4/22/1944: It is nice to be at a dock, even for a short time. They are unloading the grain and general items, but we are keeping the ammunition cargo. I was able to send a short note (a V-Mail form) to Norma telling her how I miss her. Nice, not having to provide your own paper.

They take them up onboard, then take the notes ashore to send. They had a Navy censor right there to make sure you don't say anything you are not to repeat. I did ask her about that Easter picture I would like to have.

4/25/1944: Well, the mail guys have found us and I got three letters from my girl. I am still hurting from visiting the Navy's shore 'dentist' but very happy for the mail.

The weather is weird here. Sunny then rains then stormy then sunny again. And it stays light until 2200 hours.

Bill informed us a freighter leaving out of Scotland for London was damaged by a mine even though they were in a convoy. I guess we need to be on watch and make sure our degaussing coils are working properly.



From Left to right: Man standing with towel is William Caswell Reed, Olin Norman Leake, Earsel Stacy, Eugene Joseph O'Reilly (hidden by Ray's towel), Raymond Herbert Boettcher and Oracio Fernandes.

Olin, Stacy and I found a way to get some swim time at a nearby beach, while our ship is sitting at dock. We took along two shipmates with us named Bill Reed and Oracio Fernandes. We had a great time even though the water was somewhat cold. It was nice to get away from the ship for a short time.

Luckily, when I was ashore, I found some paper to use for writing my letters. I need to correct her understanding. When I called her my 'Victory Girl', I did not use it like others do. They use the term to label girls, who for patriotism, 'entertain' lonely sailors, when they are in US ports.

My thought was that she is my motivation for pushing on to Victory, so I can get home to her. This is going to be tough to correct with her. I wish I knew, if this is going to be a short trip, then heading back or not.

4/28/1944: The scuttlebutt is we are moving out of the docks, so I sent a last telegram to Norma, when I went ashore at lunchtime. Just a note to let her know, I got her letters. Mailed my letters as well. The telegram said:

VERY HAPPY TO HEAR FROM YOU, DEAREST.
AM FIT AND WELL.
ALL MY LOVE
RAYMOND H. BOETTCHER

I used my full 'Raymond H Boettcher' since I was below the minimum letter count and it would not cost me extra.

5/5/1944: It's Friday. We have moved away from the dock and out into the 'Firth of Clyde' bay area. We still have the ammo cargo, which makes me think, we are not ready to head home.

Bill continues to keep us up on the action nearby. Seems about a week ago, there was a battle near the Isle of Portland, on the south side of England which faces German-held France. Bill said 9-10 German torpedo boats attacked a convoy of 8 LSTs. They did sink 2 LSTs and damaged a third one, before retreating back to the French shore. That sure brings the fight closer to where I'm sitting.

5/11/1944: Again, still sitting in the bay. I got to use a 'V-Mail' form again for sending messages. Not quite like a telegram. They take all the forms we wrote our messages on, and the censor reviews them. Then they go ashore to be sent off by mail. I know I haven't written in a while, but I have been stuck out here in the bay. The place is getting crowded with all types of ships, ready for something to load or unload.

I miss her. I need to tell her; it is going to be a long time before I get back to the U.S.

5/16/1944: It's Tuesday, but it feels like any other day. We run our drills, respond to alarms and clean all the guns every day, even though we haven't fired them. We are still sitting, but it appears a lot of movement is happening around us. Our neighbors in the bay, change daily.

It's late again, but I need to write a letter so it will be ready, when the mail boat comes to call. I found some half-size paper to use.

I guess she is going to know, I didn't have a letter, written to her for each day I am at sea. What to write is the problem. I miss her. I think often about the first night, sitting on the swing and thinking those sailor thoughts.

No, that's wrong of me. After I left her house, my thinking was more about how sweet and wonderful she was. I felt as if I had fallen in love. It was great and I felt happier than I ever have.

Still, I want the Easter picture she promised me. I bet she had a pretty outfit to wear. I hope, I have found enough paper on which to write all these thoughts. Or I might have to shorten my writing.

5/19/1944: If they put any more ships in this bay, somebody is going to hit us. This crowded area reminds of my time on the *SS Collis P. Huntington*, when the *SS Timothy Pickering* hit us right before Christmas.

Of course, if it wasn't for that incident, I might not have met my sweetheart. I think, I will get one of those V-Mail forms and send her a short note, now that I am dreaming of her. Also, this reminds me, I haven't gotten her Easter picture. Maybe, I will try to go ashore and check the mail center personally.

Bill just told us, he had heard a German sub damaged the US merchant tanker *SS Pan Pennsylvania* and ten AGs were lost in the attack. The sub did get sunk by attacks from some escorts at the scene, along New England's coast..



SS Pan-Pennsylvania was a Type T3-S-BF1 tanker

But closer to us was another German submarine doing damage to an escort, **USS Donnell**, southwest of Ireland. Seems like enemy subs are everywhere.



USS Donnell (DE-56), a Buckley-class destroyer escort. On May 3, 1944, USS Donnell made a sound contact, then sighted a periscope a few minutes later. They pressed home a depth charge attack on the German submarine. She was struck by a torpedo which blew off her stern. Explosion of her own depth charges inflicted additional damage on the escort. Her casualties were 29 killed and 25 wounded.



Navy ships and Army supplies at Southampton Docks preparing for D-Day

5/25/1944: Still sitting, but activity is still high around us. Scuttlebutt is saying we are moving soon. I hope this is true, as I am tired of sitting in one spot. If we move, maybe the view will be better. I did get mail today. Six were from my beautiful girl. I need to send off another V-Mail letter. She is holding her vacation, waiting for my return. She didn't want to miss me, like she did last summer. But I need to tell her to go ahead, because I may be here for quite a while. Then, I will write a long letter when I have time.

6/01/1944: It's Thursday. We have been moved to Poole Bay on the south side of England. This is just part of the English Channel area. It is full of our hunter-killer ship groups, defending the coast. Still, just to our west, is where those LSTs were attacked around the Isle of Portland.

6/05/1944: While on early watch today, I was standing in driving rain! The sea was bouncing me around like a buoy. I could hardly see 100 feet. I was still able to notice a lot of ships were moving fast in and out from the Southampton port. A very nasty day to be on water or land.



Troops of the Highland Light Infantry of Canada going aboard an L.C.I.(L) at dawn. June 6, 1944. Place: Southampton, England.

6/06/1944: I was on the midnight-0400 watch. I can't believe I am writing what I saw. With a full moon, I could see the sky was solid with airplanes heading towards France. Some appeared to be pulling gliders, behind them. The bay was quickly becoming empty as ships loaded with troops were headed towards France as well. About mid-day, the ***SS Thomas Scott*** moved into the position for docking at Southampton.



D-Day, the invasion of France, June 6, 1944. American crafts of all styles at Omaha Beach, Normandy, during the first stages of the Allied invasion.

6/7/1944: We had pulled away from the dock. We now had troops packed onboard. Then we sat in the Solent Channel leading to Poole Bay, awaiting our orders to head to France. The invasion must have started yesterday! Waves of ships were steadily moving to France with many coming back empty, to reload supplies, men and vehicles. The sky is still full of planes. I could hear the explosions of the battle as I stood at my gun station.

I wonder if Norma knows anything about what's happening over here.



Allied ships, boats and barrage balloons off Omaha Beach after the successful D-Day invasion. With the beach taken, ships move close to shore to unload reinforcements and vehicles

6/8/1944: Today, we were moved into a small convoy ECM-1 out in the Poole Bay area. I can smell the containers of gasoline, we loaded for the army vehicles. About supper time, we ate no meal. We were moving to France in a convoy of 14 ships and 4 escorts. Some of the troops were getting sea-sick from the rough water. The war is about to get very real for me now. As we were moving, we were in total blackout. The overcast sky kept the moon from lighting us up. We stayed at our station and will likely sleep, if we can, here. I hope my writing is readable.

6/12/1944: I am writing this as we begin our return to Southampton. I am still alive! But I don't know if I can still live life as I had before, after the past three days.

By mid-morning of June ninth, the ***SS Thomas Scott*** had arrived at Omaha Beach. The German shore batteries were shelling our ship and hitting some of those around us. So many ships were jammed in near shore, unloading troops and vehicles, we were unable to get close enough to unload ours.

Finally, we moved farther down the coast to Utah Beach. It took 10 hours to get there through the smoke, the fog, crowds of ships and the bodies floating everywhere. The shelling was as intense as we saw at Omaha beach.

About dark, a bomb drops 200 yards off our bow and explodes, waking us from our tired sleepy bodies.

Before dawn on the tenth of June, an air raid bomb from an Italian plane finds the ship immediately on our starboard side. The **SS Charles Morgan** sunk quickly but not completely, as she was in shallow waters of about 30 feet deep. Fortunately, if that is the right word to use, the ship had already unloaded its troops and cargo. Only the crew needed to be rescued by the ships heading out from the beach. We put up a balloon with a long cable, to prevent planes from coming directly overhead of the ship and firing on us. By dark, we were in position to unload our troops, vehicles, gas and ammo onto LCIs that would take them to shore. It was slow going.



6/10/1944: SS Charles Morgan, before being bombed while sitting next to the SS Thomas Scott. Both were at Utah Beach to unload men, vehicles and gasoline. In the Editor's Notes at the end; is the injury report from the bomber attack on the SS Charles Morgan. Their cargo of troops and supplies had already been discharged, thank God! (519thPortBn.com)

Again, we spent the night at our station, firing when Olin sighted something on shore or in the air.

Sometimes, it was hard to tell who was who, from all the smoke. Near dark, the shore batteries again shelled us for what seemed like hours. Olin sighted their location. He would slap me on the back when I was to pull the firing trigger.

Before dawn on the eleventh of June, the air raid bombing would begin again. We had finished our unloading and was trying to back out to give another ship room to unload. Another bomb came close to our port side. Maybe 7-800 yards out. Still, too close for me. It took us all day to move out far enough, to turn north and find a convoy returning to Southampton. I could see the **USS Charles Morgan** dead in the water as we left.



SS Charles Morgan, next day after being bombed, 6/11/1944.

On June twelfth, we headed back in convoy FBM-4. It looked like about 25-30 ships, had started moving towards England, at breakfast time. It's funny, they would have a convoy number among all this chaos. Still, I am alive and I know I am alive, because I am hungry, very hungry.

6/13/1944: It was dark when we got back to Poole Bay last night. But we are again waiting to dock in Southampton to reload and return to France. As we wait, I wrote a short letter to Norma. I can't mention the past few days or it will get censored. Or scare her if not censored. I'll say the usual, hope you are well, give the family my best regards and hope you have a wonderful vacation.

Also, I am not a sailor 'handing her a line'! When I say there is no one else I love or care for as much as her. I am sincere and truthful! Just a normal, same stuff letter, like nothing here has happen. I wonder if she knows about the invasion.

6/15/1944: I was able to mail that letter I wrote when we were docked. We were reloading for a return to France this morning. We have army vehicles, gasoline containers and a ship full of troops who will need these supplies. I guess I will be sleeping at my gun station again. I just hope there is not many of them vomiting on the trip.

6/17/1944: The *SS Thomas Scott* left out of the Southampton docks yesterday morning, before breakfast (we did eat), to our usual spot in Poole Bay. About midnight of the sixteenth, the General Quarters Alarm sounded but of course we were already at our guns. Later I learned, there was a warning of enemy planes in the area over what Bill calls the R/T (*Editor Note: Radio Telephony equipment for ship to ship communications*). A few minutes later a single plane flew over but we didn't get any signal to open fire.



A corvette is a small warship. It is traditionally the smallest class of vessel considered to be a proper warship. The Flower-class corvette was a British class of 294 corvettes used during World War II. Royal Navy ships of this class were named after flowers, hence the name of the class.

We didn't sit long at Poole Bay. Later, we joined convoy, ECM-8, of some 22 ships with a couple of destroyers, corvettes and several mine sweepers according to Bill. We left out of Poole Bay about mid-morning. The trip was again slow with heavy ship traffic, we arrived at Utah Beach just after dark.

By daylight today, the seventeenth, we were unloading the cargo and troops at Utah Beach. The bodies were still floating in the water but not as many. The shore batteries must have been over-run by allies since they didn't fire on us.

About midnight, a thunderbolt flew across us from port to starboard dropping green / yellow flares. Initially, we didn't recognize it as hostile or friendly, so we didn't fire at it. The LCIs around did fire on it. Lt. Panaccion said, they need to improve how signals for firing are given and which ship has that authority.



The largest and heaviest single-seat fighter ever built and the fastest fighter in WWII. The

Thunderbolt reached speeds of 504 mph at 34,000 feet in level flight and consumed an astonishing 330 gallons of fuel per hour. The P-47M was designed with speed, altitude and range. The "Jug" was responsible for more victories than any other aircraft in WWII. Bodyguard to the bombers of the European Theater, the P-47 gave the Allies air superiority.

6/18/1944: We left out of Utah Beach early this morning. By late afternoon, we were sitting in our favorite spot, Poole Bay. The convoy, FCM-9B, when going back seemed to be the same group of ships we came with, except the minesweepers were missing. They stayed in the Utah Beach area clearing mines.

But before we left Utah Beach, we received another warning of enemy planes approaching from the southwest. The planes were dropping clusters of 10-12 flares from what I saw.

They sounded general alarm, we were already manning all guns, but received no signal to fire. Naval vessels and shore batteries did open fire on the planes.



*Merchant ship loading at Southampton dock for France. June 17, 1944
(Imperial War Museum Photo)*

6/20/1944: We have gotten into a dock at Southampton. We are reloading more vehicles, gasoline and water containers. I heard the troops will be loaded later while we are sitting out in the bay, awaiting convoy instructions. Guess they don't want them aboard getting seasick, until it's time to go to France. I better write something to my darling, so it can be mailed before we pull away from the dock. I did get some mail, when we hit the dock today.

Let's see there were two from Marie and 8 from Norma. I can't tell her why I haven't written very much lately. I know she will understand, if she is hearing the invasion news on the radio or in the papers. I will tell her; I was involved in the invasion but am safely back in England. That way she won't worry.

I wish she didn't mention our first night together on the swing in this letter. It made me homesick. I can't wait until I am out of the Navy and home for good to be with her.

6/27/1944: The troops came aboard last night, brought out by 'motor launches' running back and forth. We started out mid-morning from the Solent Strait, just out of Southampton. We are joining a convoy, ECM-5, but Bill said we are going to Omaha Beach, not Utah, this time. He's the communications guy and should know.

The convoy had about a dozen ships. I saw 1 destroyer, some corvettes and several of the gun boats that ferried the troops to us last time. And as I write this journal entry, about 2200 hours, we are sitting within sight of Omaha Beach.



A Motor Launch (ML) is a small military vessel in Royal Navy service. It was designed for harbor defense, submarine chasing or for armed high-speed rescue.

6/28/1944: We all had to laugh at Bill this morning. We are moving, not closer in to Omaha Beach but away from it. Bill says orders were changed. We are to depart for Utah Beach. I am sure he didn't know of the change, until told. I could have guessed it, because Omaha beach is again a traffic nightmare. We arrived this evening at our favorite beach, Utah, just before I started my journal writing.

6/30/1944: Yesterday, we didn't have to wait long. Almost when we arrived, we had a spot to begin unloading the cargo and troops. Seems the Army has secured the coastline, as we had no incidents with shelling or air raid troubles.

The *SS Thomas Scott* departed again from Utah Beach for South Hampton. She has been a good ship. Our convoy, FCM-18, had double the ships going back than we came with by my count. Still had the destroyers and corvettes with us, but the gun boats stayed at the beach.

When we left Utah Beach, we were eating a quick breakfast, then back to our stations. We again arrived outside Southampton about dark. It's nice to be in my bunk tonight, writing instead manning our guns. I wonder how many trips we will make to the beaches of France.

7/01/1944: They are moving things a lot quicker now. When we got to Southampton during the night, we were put in dock immediately. Again, they were loading vehicles, gas and water containers. Also, the troops are coming aboard which to me means we aren't sitting in the bay long after we pull away from the dock. The mail guys found me today, so I better send one of those V-Mail letters to Norma. Got to let her know I am safe and not to worry. Sometimes she seems to worry a lot about my being in the Navy.

7/2/1944: Today, we departed our anchorage area just off the Isle of Wright about mid-morning. We hadn't even let our anchor out fully. I hated to leave because I could see three big huge stacks rising out of the water of stone maybe. It was wonderful. One of the Army guys said they are called 'The Needles'.

The convoy, ECM-20W, had maybe 15 to 20 ships and I counted four corvettes. Bill again says we are going to Omaha Beach and again, we all laughed.

7/03/1944: Well, today Bill is laughing at us. We arrived Omaha Beach late last night and were awaiting an unload spot. And it wasn't long. We started unloading around lunch. They have really got the ship movements now well planned. We are not losing time waiting.

7/4/1944: We left Omaha Beach area about dinner and arrived here at Southampton, before 2400 hours. The convoy, FWM-7A, again had twice as many ships going back than came. Even a gunboat came back with us. I wonder how many officers it takes to keep up with these convoy names. I need to remember that today is the 4th of July, our country's birthday and it is for them we are here fighting.

7/05/1944: We came directly into the dock at Southampton last night and they immediately started loading vehicles, gasoline and water containers and troops. It was noisy and I didn't get any rest. I also saw some crates labeled 'Canteen Supplies'. I had written another quick V-Mail letter and handed it off to the mail guy before we pulled away. I wished her a wonderful vacation and not to worry. By breakfast, ate quickly again, we were leaving the normal anchorage area without slowing. The convoy, ECM-23, was headed to Omaha Beach again. We had about two dozen ships and maybe some corvettes with us.

7/6/1944: We arrived as told at Omaha Beach but did have to wait unloading. Seems the LCIs were busy with so much to unload they were falling behind. I wonder if any of those guys slept, since ships are arriving around the clock. Also, it appeared the beach is getting full of supplies that needed moving farther inland.

7/09/1944: They got us spot to unload but it was much slower than last visit. Maybe they could catch up if they left one of those canteen crates on board. But they didn't. Around dinner we were unloaded and backing away to let another ship move in.

If we had no enemy contact. We should be back to Southampton by dark which is still about 2100 or 2200 hour. Our convoy, I forgot to get the silly number, seemed to be about the same number of ships and corvettes going back. Olin said he spotted one of those ML boats with us when he stood his watch.

7/11/1944: We did get to dock in Southampton yesterday and they loaded us with the same cargo of troops, vehicles, gasoline and water containers. Guess they don't trust us with the canteen supplies this trip.

I did get another V-Mail letter off to Norma yesterday. Told her I hope to be with her on next year's vacation and to remember every day is a day closer to my being home permanently. I assured her everything is swell here, so she won't worry. We pulled away from the dock about supper and headed for anchorage in the Solent Straits.

7/12/1944: The *SS Thomas Scott* departed our anchorage area just out from Southampton about mid-morning. Again, we arrive Utah Beach about an hour after I started my 20-hundred-hour watch. Same cargo of Army vehicles, gas, water and troops. Convoy, ECM-8, had about 19 ships with 3 corvettes by my count.

7/15/1944: There continued to be traffic confusion and we didn't get unloaded until today. I guess I spoke too soon about them having everything well planned. By nightfall we had exited the beach area and began heading back to Southampton anchorage area in a smaller convoy of 14 ships with 1 corvette and 2 coast guard crafts by Olin's count.

7/16/1944: It's Friday and we are safely back. We got to our regular anchorage area about daylight and breakfast was more relaxed, than previously, these past weeks. We are waiting to reload I would guess, so it seems I might have time to write my girl.

It's nice to have a chance to think what to write her than thinking of possibly being sunk by the Germans. Boy, it would be great to be with her now. But it's hard to write and listen to 'Red Skelton' that Olin has playing on the radio.

I do miss her very much and there is not much to tell without the censors striking it out. Its 2130 hour. Who knows when we will get loaded back for another return to France.

7/19/1944: It's Monday and like the past six weeks, we are docked in Southampton and being loaded with the regular stuff of gasoline, vehicles and water containers. I got the letter sent off but didn't receive any mail. The troops will board after all the cargo has been secured aboard.

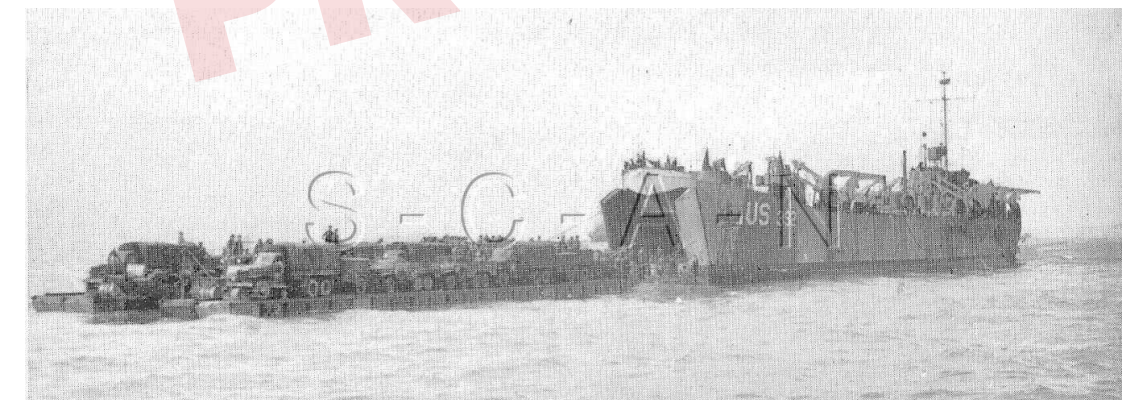
Its 2100 hour and I had stood the 1700-to-2100-hour watch. It was difficult to see any sun setting on the horizon whose view was not cluttered with military of some type like tanks, crates of ammunition, armed jeeps and food supplies. All items moving to ships for transport to France. Guess Army guys gotta eat like us sailors.

Well, here comes the troops. This means we are loaded and heading to anchorage to wait a convoy assignment.

7/21/1944: The *SS Thomas Scott* must have found a ride and we departed anchorage area as we were about to eat dinner. We arrived Utah Beach after dark in a convoy, EPM-11, which appeared to have over two dozen ships. I did see a destroyer and a couple of corvettes, as well.

7/25/1944: Utah beach was so crowded with ships it caused us to sit for three days waiting for LCTs or Rhinos to unload us.

Right now, after supper we are moving away from the beach and moving up the coast to Omaha Beach according to the latest scuttlebutt. Maybe they have space for us to unload.



Example of a Rhino ferry, attached securely to the LST. After taking on full load (Troops, vehicles, etc.) will cast off and head for shore.

7/26/1944: We certainly got attention at Omaha. They started unloading us before our anchor hit the bottom. We got here about 2100 hour last night and they finished unloading us by dinner today.

In convoy, FPM-17, we arrived at anchorage area #4 for Southampton. The convoy returning was much bigger than when we went out. I must have seen over three dozen ships, and I counted four corvettes. Joe and Stacy said they saw a couple of personal watercrafts following us. We guessed they were rich 'Frenchies' trying to get to England.

8/1/1944: We finally got into the docks to load. We have been sitting out at anchorage for 7 days waiting to be reloaded. Things must really be jammed up somewhere, here or on those beaches of France. They are loading up vehicles, gasoline and water containers plus canteen supplies and MAIL. I wish some of that was for me.

8/2/1944: We began loading the troops after midnight, so I took time to rush off a telegram to Norma. Wanted to let her know I am fine and not to worry, but I know she does anyway. Again, by the time we reached anchorage area, we moved right into a convoy, EPM-23, heading to Omaha Beach. Glad Joe is able to get me these convoy numbers for my journal. The convoy had almost two dozen ships with a corvette and a Coast Guard Cutter spotted by Olin on his watch. We should reach Omaha by dark.

8/5/1944: Well, we had no luck getting unloaded at Omaha Beach, so we were again moved south to Utah Beach.

I am writing a letter to my girl because they completed unloading the troops. Now it seems quiet onboard and I can write. The sun is still up in the sky and it is 2030 hour. But it is still pretty to look at as it shines through the clouds. Other than the LCIs and the Rhinos, it is very peaceful.

I wonder how long we will be running the England to France route with supplies. I wonder if we will still be doing this at Christmas. Mail is getting normal on its delivery but it is three weeks behind, which is not important if none of it is for me.

8/6/1944: Just before dinner we departed Utah Beach and made it to Southampton very late. Our convoy, FPM-28, looked like it had over two dozen ships with a couple of corvettes and a ML Boat.

8/7/1944: We are again sitting at anchorage waiting to go in and reload. I wasn't told that we had sent our own boat ashore to get our mail. So, I missed sending my letter. Still happy because I got two letters from my girl. I'll note that in the letter I had just wrote earlier.

I feel the little P.S. note on the letter is not enough so I will write her a whole second letter to go along with the other one. Her letter was about her vacation in Michigan City. I guess she goes there every year. She seems to really enjoy the time at the beach. I would like her to send me another picture in her midriff bathing suit. A stand-up pose like the one pilot's paint on their planes. Guys around here would go wild to see how pretty my girl looks.

8/13/1944: Again, we have sat at anchorage for over a week. Just now we are moving into a dock to reload. Seems the supply line is getting full or the war front is not moving forward as fast as we are bringing them stuff.

8/14/1944: The cargo continues to be the same stuff. I wonder when Southampton is going to run out of army vehicles, water and gasoline containers. Also, we got canteen supplies and army mail.

8/15/1944: Our home called the *SS Thomas Scott* departed the anchorage area #3 of Southampton heading to Utah Beach at 1000 hour. The troops were loaded just before midnight. I doubt any of them got much sleep.

Convoy, EPM-36 (thanks again Joe), had a dozen ships with Olin seeing 2 corvettes and a Coast Guard Cutter on his watch. As I write this entry at 2200 hour, we had just arrived Utah Beach. And it looks like they are going to unload us right away.

8/17/1944: We are sitting out from Utah Beach in their anchorage area instead of heading straight back to England as normal after unloading. Scuttlebutt is we are being grouped with ships that came directly from Western ports. Nobody could tell me if that meant they came out of Ireland or the US ports. All liberty ships look pretty much alike so it is hard to tell where they started. We have already sat for 2 days in Utah's anchorage area.

8/18/1944: This morning, we got permission to depart Utah anchorage area in a convoy of two dozen ships with the same corvettes and a PT boat. We got to our Southampton anchorage area after dark.

Seemed to be a different spot in the area than we usually drop anchor. As I look at the shoreline lights, they seem dimmer, maybe farther away. It is nice to be back 'home'. But I am sure, we are here just to reload.

8/21/1944: We have sat out here all day. Even the scuttlebutt has nothing to tell us. Even Lt. Panaccion has not heard when we will be reloaded, only that we will be reloaded and heading back to supply the troops in Europe. He did say things appear to be going well in pushing the Nazis out of France.

They did a mail run out to us. One of the letters I received was from my 'Darling'. It was dated August 6th so we are still getting mail very slowly. But I am happy anyway. She did get the telegram I sent off during troop loading activities earlier this month. She says 'I am one-in-a-million' but truth is every guy would be that caring with her as their girl. I need to write Marie as well to let her and the family know how I am doing. I wonder what Dad thinks about his sons fighting the 'home country'.



*The **Red Ball Express** was a famed truck convoy system that supplied forces moving quickly through Europe after breaking out from the D-Day beaches in Normandy in 1944. To expedite cargo shipment to the front, trucks emblazoned with red balls followed a similarly marked route that was closed to civilian traffic. The trucks also had priority on regular roads. Express, at its peak, operated 5,958 vehicles that carried about 12,500 tons of supplies a day. It ran for 83 days until November 16.*

8/22/1944: Finally, we are moving in to be loaded early this morning. Most of it, is the same cargo of army vehicles, gas and water containers. But I did observe some boxes labeled 'Red Ball Express'. Lt. Panaccion says it was a trucking system to move supplies off the beaches and up to the front quicker. The troops were loaded last just before midnight. Again, I was able to get someone on a transport to mail my letter when they got back to the dock.

8/24/1944: We have sat almost two days at anchorage waiting for a convoy ride to France. With all these army guys aboard, it is very noisy and hard to rest. They have squeezed us out of our mess area, so most of us take our meals back to our various gun placements.

8/25/1944: Early about mid-morning the *SS Thomas Scott* finally finds a ride with a convoy of only 5 ships with 1 corvette and 1 Coast Guard Cutter. So small we could count them exactly. By dinner we were joining up with convoy, EPM-44, of a dozen LSTs. Stacy saw 1 ML Boat and 2 more Coast Guard Cutters. We were again told they came from 'western ports'. This has to mean from Ireland, Wales or even Scotland ports. As I write this entry after dark, we are just arriving at Utah Beach.

8/27/1944: Yesterday, we were unloaded in a very efficient manner it seemed. It was fast. And the beach did not look crowded with supplies and equipment as it often did lately. We left out of the Utah Beach anchorage area to catch a convoy home about dinner today. The convoy, FWM-16, had more ships going back but we did see only 1 gunboat going along with us. The anchorage area was completely different this time. We anchored outside St. Helen's Road, a town on the east-side of the Isle of Wright. The island is just south of the bay into Southampton and Portland but we normally anchor on the west-side. As usual, we arrived just about midnight as I am finishing this entry. I need to get some rest as I am on the 0400 to 0800 watch.

8/30/1944: Everything is getting to be a routine of load, unload, reload and unload. Southampton to Utah and back then repeat. One good thing is we haven't had any enemy contact since late June. I am sure my girl would be happy to hear that. I do need to write her soon. I have been lazy about writing and the mail hasn't had any letters for me.

No Red Ball boxes this time but I saw the same vehicles, water and gasoline containers. I am told the troops will come aboard in the morning. That's good for us, it's quiet tonight. Nice for relaxing and sleeping.

9/1/1944: Talking about routine, it always appears we leave anchorage #3 in the middle of the morning and arrive at Utah Beach after dark. Same as today. Convoy, EPM-51 (Joe is good at getting these), had less than a dozen ships and only one corvette. I was ready to go after we were just sitting in the water for an extra day after loading.

9/4/1944: We had a slight wait but still those Rhino and LST guys got us unloaded pretty fast, yesterday. Same routine leaving today at midmorning and arriving well after dark. Took some time to hook up with the convoy, FWM-20. We arrived at anchorage area #22. Not our normal spot but we have been here before.

9/5/1944: I learned we are anchored here, so some metal workers can come aboard to repair our port and starboard boilers. I am told it will take 5-7 days. Sounds like I might have time to write my darling after we disassemble, clean and re-assemble all our guns. They haven't had any maintenance since June.

9/09/1944: The mail boat found us yesterday. I got a couple of letters including one from Norma. I better write a quick note to send if I get a chance. We haven't finished the gun cleaning. Lt. Panaccion included some painting work as well. Her letter was from Chicago and the earlier one was during her vacation in Michigan City. Does she never stay home!

9/13/1944: We are in dock and being loaded with army vehicles, water containers and more of those Red Ball Express boxes. When they start loading troops, I found my transport guy to take my letter in for mailing. She asked a lot of questions in her letter. I agreed with her about being home for Christmas and to keep our fingers crossed.

She asked what name I preferred being called. So, I told her the joke around here is 'you can call me anything, just don't call me late for chow'. I hope she will laugh. It was sweet of her to ask. I told her in my letter, she could just keep calling me 'Raymond'. I sure do miss her terribly. I did get the letter handed off to be sent. I need to get his name and thank him properly.

9/14/1944: Off again to Utah beach at mid-morning as routine and as routine, arrived about dark. This was the very first time we traveled independently, i.e. no convoy, no escorts. Still had a 'convoy' number for this 1 ship, EPM-63, according to Joe.

9/19/1944: We are continuing to sit and sit at anchorage. While we wait to be unloaded, the troops are getting nervous and loud. We let them use our basketball so they could entertain themselves. We were painting. Word from Joe's contact in communications was a big convoy directly from New York was being unloaded ahead of us. They used up all the available Rhinos and LCTs. So much for the Red Ball Express boxes moving at a fast pace.

9/22/1944: Finally got unloaded yesterday. I think some army guy took our ball when they disembark because it is nowhere to be found. We left after dinner which is later than routine but still got back after dark. Again, no convoy and no escorts. Joe says we had not been given a convoy number on our return. Are things going that well in the war where they can get sloppy!

9/28/1944: Today we are sitting at anchorage in our normal #3 area. But our cargo is not army vehicles, not water containers, not supplies for the front or even troops. We were loaded with sand when docking at Liverpool. It is used to make the ship ride smoother in ocean travel. Sounds like we are not doing short trips to France anymore. We departed after dinner and appeared to be heading west!

I searched out Lt. Panaccion but found O'Reilly first. He said we will be joining up with a group of ships within the hour, about two dozen, heading to New York in a convoy, ON-256. I am a happy sailor now. Olin, Stacy, Joe and I stood at the stern of the ship and happily waved goodbye to the British Isles! She must have kept those fingers crossed for a Christmas at home.

9/30/1944: I guess this is a popular convoy. Yesterday morning, three ships joined up with us. Today about dinner, another forty or more ships with a couple of escorts joined us. Olin sighted an aircraft carrier joining as well. So, what does that make us, sixty - seventy ships?

10/11/1944: I guess the Lt. believes the guns are still in need of cleaning and painting. And still there is time for drills and firing practice after we move to the perimeter of the convoy. Wouldn't want to shoot at our own ships.

10/12/1944: We arrived back in the good old USA about dusk. New York sure looked beautiful in the fog with the sun streaming through it. There were twenty-seven of us guardsmen. Everyone one of us was glad to be 'home'!



Statue of Liberty, October 12, 1944, returning from Europe.

10/13/1944: I used the telegram counter at the AGC, to send 'sweets' a message about my arrival.

DEAR NORMA ARRIVED SAFE NEW YORK MISS YOU TERRIBLE
MAY BE HOME SOON YOU ARE MORE THAN EVER IN MY
THOUGHTS AT THIS TIME
LOVE RAYMOND

10/16/1944: All of us were officially 'detached' from the *SS Thomas Scott* today. They already had a replacement crew lined up. I met some of them at the AG Center but didn't know any of them before. A lot of the new guys were anxious to see Europe.

10/17/1944: I was told today about qualifying for the Good Conduct Medal and being processed for some leave. I will leave everything here; seabag, journal in a locker until I return. I am going home on a 16-day leave. I better call and let her know to cancel any vacation she has planned.

11/04/1944: I got back last night on the train. I retrieved my seabag and journal from the locker at the AGC here in Brooklyn. I slept on a cot here during the night. I will look for a YMCA room later today. I did not see any orders waiting for me or postings for my next ship assignments. I certainly enjoyed my leave because I got to spend a lot of time with Norma. I guess I should apologize to her for trying to get 'fresh' with her. I guess I wanted more than just a kiss. But she is a decent girl and this is another reason why I love her. I need to send a telegram, letting her know I have arrived.

DEAREST DARLING ARRIVED SAFELY WILL WRITE LATER
YOU ARE MORE THAN EVER IN MY THOUGHT AT THIS TIME
ALL MY LOVE
RAYMOND

11/5/1944: Found a nice room at the YMCA. I sat around the center but still no ship assignment for me. I didn't see anyone I had served with around there either. I did finish a letter to my girl and properly apologized for my actions. Told her to slap me if I try it again. I said I was proud of her refusal.

11/6/1944: It is Monday, I am sitting in the lounge area at the AGC writing in my journal and I still haven't seen anyone I know. I don't know what ship Olin, Joe and Stacy went to serve upon. I don't even know what my next ship will be. If I am not thinking of Navy stuff, I am thinking of her, my darling.

I just finished a short letter to her but had nothing to say. I just miss her and think about the wonderful time we had on my leave. I did check the 'What's Happening in the War' board. Seems most of the action is in the Mediterranean, Indian Ocean or the Pacific Area. This might mean we have the Atlantic mostly in control. Yeah, for the Navy.

11/07/1944: Nothing happening here at the AGC and I just sit around looking for orders to a ship assignment. I found some Salvation Army paper. I will write some letters with it. First one will be short letter to my sweetheart. I just want to say how much I miss her more now than ever before. This letter may be short but my thoughts of her are very, very long.

11/8/1944: It is only Wednesday and I am still just sitting around here waiting for a ship assignment. But it is a good day because President Roosevelt was re-elected for a 4th term. He has been really supportive of going all out to win this war. This was the first election I was old enough to cast a vote.

I keep going to the desk asking about a ship assignment, but they always say nothing has shown up for me. Last time I went up to the desk, I got the same answer and more 'Salvation Army Stationary'. They told me to go write a letter to my girl back home and if something comes up, they definitely know my name.

Well, I guess I should do just that. I can tell her I am waiting on a ship assignment hopefully to ship out within the week. One good thing about being here at the AGC is I get my mail when it arrives each day. Today, three letters were from Norma. The system is still running behind by two months. These letters were written in September near her birthday. Oh, I forgot to write and wish her 'Happy Birthday' back when we were running supplies to France.

Oh, wait, one is dated November 5th of THIS year! I guess the mail service is getting much better. At least here in the states. Her September letters sounded like she was lonesome. Hopefully, my visit in October cured her lonesomeness. I need to remember to thank her for the bracelet she gave me.

I do think of her when I look at it. Also, I need to brag to her about getting a three year 'Good Conduct' medal. It certainly wasn't for how I acted on my last day of leave with her.

11/09/1944: Well sitting around the AGC finally paid off, in a way. I didn't get a ship assignment but was transferred to PhibTraBase (Amphibious Training Base), Camp Bradford in Virginia. I am to report next day. I have got to move fast, sign out of the YMCA with my seabag, write Norma and catch the bus this evening taking us to Camp Bradford.

I read on the 'War' board about the US Tanker *Fort Lee* being sunk in the Indian Ocean by a German sub. Last report is 10 perished of the 26-man Armed Guard group. Also in the Pacific, U.S. freighter *Matthew P. Deady* is hit by kamikazes that were getting intense anti-aircraft fire from their Armed Guard. The explosion of the suicide plane starts a fire in the cargo hold that threatens the ship. Two Armed Guard sailors (of the 27-man detachment) perished in the attack.

I will use some more of their 'Salvation Army' stationary to write Norma and mail it right here at the AGC. I'll tell her where I am going and will send her the new address after I get squared away. Need to remind her not to worry. Since I am here in the states, maybe I can easier get leave to go home.

11/10/1944: The bus left the AGC about dark last night and arrived at Camp Bradford just at daylight today, Friday. We are all hungry, of course. But being the Navy, processing us through was the first order of business. We missed the morning chow and would have to wait until dinner to eat. We got our racks assigned and were told the schedule for the next few weeks. After dinner, we got a tour of the place. It is small for a base but there are four bases within this area. I do not know anyone here but I will just have to make new friends.

11/12/1944: It has been a long day of mustering for physical training and running. I need to write to my sweetheart as I promised. It has been 3 days. Maybe she thinks I have forgotten her since I left out of the AGC. Need to remind her; she is ALL I think about. I get homesick because I think of being with her so much. I must get my new address to her but I don't know it yet. I love her with all my heart. If she uses the old mailing address, it might be weeks before it reaches me.

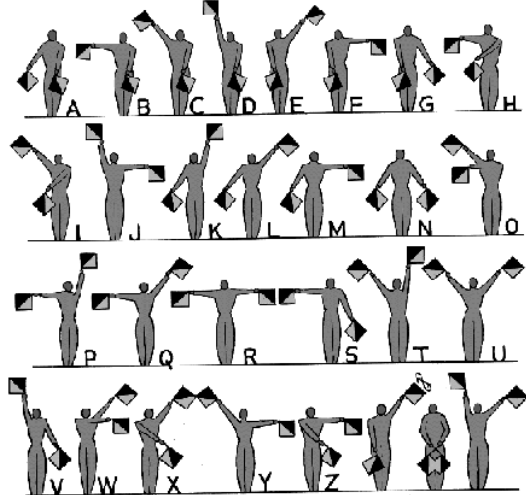
11/13/1944: At breakfast, the scuttlebutt around the table was about a U.S. freighter *Lee S. Overman* that was mined just off Le Havre, France. This is just east of where I spent most of 1944 running to Utah and Omaha beaches. None of the 27-man Armed Guard complement were injured. And here I thought we had the coast of France secured. The War continues.

11/15/1944: It is only Wednesday and I feel like I have been here for weeks. All we have been doing is get up to eat at 0600, then muster to be led off to some training. The training has been mostly physical training to get us back into shape like they did in Great lakes. Also, did some rifle range shooting and watch seamanship movies.

I feel like I am with a bunch of rookies who haven't been to sea. They talk about my going to gunnery school. And here I am a GM3c.

One new thing I was told, is possibly being trained for an LST crew assignment. When I write Norma, I better remind her what an LST does. She might worry if tell her it runs ashore and unloads the invasion forces and supplies. Maybe I should avoid telling her. I do need to write her and tell her the address of where I am now stationed. It's nice we have time for ourselves after 1730 hours. Almost like having a regular job.

11/16/1944: I have had another long day but I am getting in better shape. After morning football, I attended seamanship and semaphore school. I will need to tell Norma when I write what semaphore means. It is a system of sending messages by holding my arms, with a flag in each hand, in certain positions according to an alphabetic code. Boy, are my arms tired.



*Illustration of semaphore 2:
alphabet;
The 3 positions following Z are:
error, end of word, and
numerals follow;
Then numerals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,
9, 0
use same positions
as A through J*

In the afternoon, I had boxing instruction. With tired arms, my punches were very weak and slow. I watched two training movies to make it a long day. I write that a lot, I think. Sadly, I got no mail today from my darling. I wish I could hold her in my tired arms.

11/18/1944: It is late and I am tired from 'mustering' here and there all week. But it ended great when I got six letters from my darling. First mail since I had arrived here. One had a really great poem that makes me look a lot more wonderful than I am. Almost embarrassing every time I read it. I need to let her know I send envelops unsealed for the censors to read and for her not to blame her mailman. I will need to update her on my address since all her letters went to Brooklyn.

Its Saturday, so they let us have some free time to wash clothes and write letters. I may not be assigned an ocean-going ship but they are short of beds on the base. So, we are bunking on the training vessels here in the bay. This weekend we have been given the time off from training and can go ashore. We just need to be back on base by 0700 Monday morning. Since I have no money to spend in town, I will just stay around and maybe catch a movie on base.

11/19/1944: It's just my second Sunday here but the day was beautiful. I slept until 0900 which is late for me. Almost as nice as when Norma and I walked along the creek at her house. Need to write her another letter to make this day complete with these wonderful thoughts. I even went to church services at 1030. It seems it has been a long time since I had been to church.

I saw two movies this afternoon, called "**Human Comedy**" and "**Strange Affair**". I am looking forward to Thanksgiving this coming Thursday. Maybe even go to services again tonight at 1930 hours after eating. What a perfect day it was today. See Editor's Movie Info at the end of this document.

11/20/1944: We continue to hear scuttlebutt around the table about events happening in the War during breakfast. The word was Kamikazes are really doing damage with their suicide runs. In the Philippines, a group of freighters were hit and at least 7-Armed Guard sailors were killed in defending their ships.

11/21/1944: Not much has been changing for me in my schedule of training. The only change I know is 'my desire' to be with my darling grows stronger every day. I will write her again as I promise to write her every day. I hope she has a great Thanksgiving. I know I have lots to be thankful for and she is at the top of the list.

11/22/1944: I did not get picked for a ship assignment nor a school. This means I will start back as part of the induction group for the next 2 weeks. This indicates I may be here until the first of the year. I miss not being part of a ship's crew. I miss her even more. I wish I knew how to tell her what I really want to say about the two of us. I miss her terribly and love her with all my heart.

11/23/1944: I continue to hear the breakfast scuttlebutt but this morning news was close to home. It seems a heavy cruiser named *Augusta* was damaged by an explosion while sitting in the Boston Navy Yard just a few days ago. Don't know the cause but during a war, you are always suspicious.

Yet, I am in a happy mood. I got NINE letters from my very sweet young lady. They were all great. I must tell her, only a miracle will allow me to be home for Christmas next month. I will be sad because I am so close to home this year and not aboard a ship. I will write to say how good my Thanksgiving dinner was to eat. It was the best since I joined the service except for the meal aboard the *USS Crosby*. Joiner, Conoise and I went to church services after the meal at 1900 hour. It was a nice service but I did spend time thinking of Norma, even in church.

11/24/1944: It's Friday, Thanksgiving was great, and now what do I write to Norma. I am still doing physical training and learning first aid. Still going to the movies when a new one comes to the base. I have gotten some official Camp Bradford stationary to use.

Of course, I could tell her how stupid the system is for picking guys to go off for advanced training. They put your name on a card, stick all the cards in some machine and it does the picking. A buddy of mine is now going off to gunnery school while I, as a GM3, just sit until who knows how long before that machine picks me. It may be months!

11/25/1944: I promised to write every day to my darling, but I struggle to find something to write. Same goes for this journal. Today is Saturday. I have the afternoon to myself. Should I wash clothes or sleep? Norfolk is not such a good liberty town and the transportation is difficult to find. I will write Norma the truth that there is nothing to write about. I'll write after I take that nap. I will dream of her in my arms.

11/26/1944: Sunday again. Slept until 0830 hour and mustered at 0915 only for them to tell us we were free of performing any watch duties today. I was glad because watch duty here is nothing compared to how nice it is on a ship.

Nothing moves much here. When I am on watch aboard a ship, I will watch the convoy travel through the waves and the stars move in the sky above. Makes life peaceful.

I did go to 1030 hour 'services' with a couple of buddies. Wow, stuck on base, watching movies and going to church regularly. Well at least three times counting the Thanksgiving service. I need to stop writing and go get the clothes I have been soaking for an hour. They won't wash themselves. I wonder if my Darling Norma knows how to wash clothes. I would certainly think a wife should know how to wash her husband's clothes.

I certainly hope she doesn't have any ideas about having me do it just because I did them in the Navy.

11/27/1944: It's Monday but we feel like ducks because it has been raining, raining and raining. I got new letters from her and one from Marie about the family. Did I tell her in my earlier letter that we had a high school choir at Thanksgiving services? Can't remember. I don't want to repeat myself but it is just the same every day around here. She did ask if I was close to Norfolk and I am. Some go there if they have liberty. Maybe she wants to come visit. That would be swell. I miss her terribly. I guess I'll write her and maybe I will feel better. I can use the camp stationary I got.

11/28/1944: I should not have promised to write every day! I notice I say the same things in every letter; 'Hope you are in the best of health and happiness', 'I send my best regards to your family' and 'everything is alright', 'I am thinking of you'. She must get bored reading my letters.

Tonight, was beautiful with a lovely moon looking down at me. It reminded me of the first night I took her home. I knew then, she was more beautiful than the moon could ever be.

11/29/1944: It was a terrible day with cold rain coming down all day. But I got a letter from my darling. It turned my day into great. She asked what happens to me if I am not picked for a school. I will need to tell her again about going back into the 'Induction' group until a school or ship selects me. This group is where we learn semaphore, seamanship, training films and perform physical training. All of which I have done when I first arrived.

11/30/1944: What to write? My journal is getting as boring as my letters to Norma. Maybe I should talk about the weather, like old people do. Of course, here it changes with the wind. Yesterday, it rained and today it is colder than hell. I'll use 'heck' in my letter or she'll let me have 'heck' when she writes back. I try not to talk like a sailor in my letters.

I wonder if she has finished her Christmas shopping. I would enjoy carrying all the packages for her. I hope she loves me as much as I love her.

12/01/1944: It's Friday and I am very tired. The training, washing clothes and I am just too tired to write to Norma and Marie. Maybe they will forgive me for waiting until tomorrow to do letters. I do have time to read Norma's newest letter. Gosh, I wish she wouldn't say how highly she thinks of me. Makes me feel embarrassed.

My thoughts are how I can't wait to try again for those fifty kisses at the bus-stop on my next visit. Someday we will reach the number fifty. I blame the bus company for not keeping to their schedule and arriving early.

12/03/1944: Sunday and a week gone. On Tuesday they will post a new list of who goes to ships, who goes to schools and who gets sent back into the induction group. It has turned very cold. It looked like it was trying to snow this morning. I think I have been doing well in writing her most every day. So, I better get to it since I am tired and have so little to say.

12/04/1944: Another Monday, another time to write letters. She wants to know if the South Sea girls are pretty when I was in the Pacific on the **SS Mobilgas**. What I do know is they do not compare to my darling in Ohio. She wants to send me gum for some reason but I really don't chew gum. I just had teeth pulled today, so chewing much of anything is painful.

Oh, tomorrow is pay-day and I will have money to go and see Norfolk. The posted pay sheet says I will get \$117. Let me see, it would be for at least a month plus sea duty. I got no one to spend it on so I will bank about three quarters of it. I will need it for when I leave the Navy to marry Norma, soon, I hope!

12/06/1944: Better write Norma since I got a letter from her today. We have mail call every day but it takes two days for her letters to get here. I am out of Camp Bradford stationary. Back to plain paper. I am hurting badly because three of my top front teeth were infected and they pulled them on Monday. They are making a plate for me. I wonder if she will notice next time we meet.

Tomorrow is when crews are organized and schools begin. According to the posting, I will again be in the 'Induction Group' that lasts for 2 weeks.

12/07/1944: Today marks three years since the Japs attacked us at Pearl Harbor. But I spent my morning at the dentist. He filled four teeth and did an impression for the plate. I will get the plate on the 16th in time for Christmas.

This afternoon, while still hurting from the dentist, I spent doing physical training and signaling instructions. I watched a movie of '**Why we are fighting**', since it is December 7th. Now I have to do my clothes washing and write letters before lights out. *See Editor's Movie Info. at the end of this document.*

12/08/1944: What a miserable Friday. Raining almost all day. I stood the 1200-to-1700-hour watch and will need to do it again at midnight to 0400. I need to write Norma to answer the two letters of hers I got today. I am tired and sure the letter will be messy with ugly handwriting. I am so tired and I miss her so much I have tears in my eyes.

12/09/1944: I am on watch and it is 0230 hour. But I am stuck in the communications office because I am the messenger for the 'Officer-of-the-Deck' or the O.D. I just sit here drinking coffee until a message comes in for me to deliver to the captain or whom-ever. So far, nothing to deliver. I guess I should stop writing in this journal and write a letter to my sweets.

12/10/1944: Another Sunday of sitting around doing nothing. I'm like a 4F when all the other guys are on a ship fighting the war and here, I sit. Waste of government money. I would like to be at sea helping to end this war. As bad as I feel, I did get a letter from my darling. It helped brighten my mood. I keep thinking of her pictures. I have three with me here at Camp Bradford. The one she showed me on leave, was of her sitting on a wall looking out over a large lake with her hair blowing in the wind. Maybe she was in Chicago when it was taken. I'll have to ask her to send it to me.



12/11/1944: I am still part of the induction group, waiting for a crew or school assignment. A new list goes up on Thursday the 14th. I am disgusted with waiting around, I feel better when I tell my darling how I am unhappy with the situation. I am sure I am boring her with my attitude. I got to write something every day to her like I promise. At least, each letter gives me the opportunity to say how much I love her.

12/12/1944: This journal is doing a lousy job of helping me think of things to write to Norma. About the best thing happening, is a new guy moved into our hut and he has a radio. It's swell to sit and listen to the music. It is nice of him to share it with us. I guess it will be a short letter to my sweetheart but I will always have space in the letter to send her my love.

12/13/1944: It's a good day because I got two letters from my darling Norma. It's a bad day because I realize I won't be home for the holidays to be with her. She writes that she cares for me, Her love will help make me happy over Christmas. And she writes she thinks the O.D is code for a red-head. How funny she can be. I need to write her after that comment.



First picture is from 'Summer of 1943, Michigan City, To Ray Love Norma' The second picture is from her vacation in August 1944. Both sent in December 1944.

12/15/1944: I am tired. I had a watch last night from 2000-to-2400 hours. I had to get up at 0430 hours today and stand watch from 0700-to-1200 hours. I have to shower and shave, then shine my shoes. I have to get my uniforms in looking-good condition for inspection tomorrow. I will write a short letter to my love because she sent me two great pictures of herself. God bless her for thinking of me.

12/16/1944: The inspection went well this morning with no comments on my stuff. I checked the base post office but there was no mail for me. I will write my darling now before I go into Norfolk to see what all the fuss is about from the other guys.

12/17/1944: Norma must be lonely to write me two more letters or she truly loves me very much to write so often. In a way, that is good and I truly enjoy getting each and every one. She says she needs someone to warm her hands in the cold Ohio weather. I know just the guy but I am stuck here in Virginia.

I'll let her know in my next letter how unimpressive the city of Norfolk was when I went Saturday night. I wonder if Norma knows anyone here who could show me the better parts of Norfolk. I need to include Florence Shuck's address she requested. Didn't Florence work with her at SS Kresges! Maybe Florence quit and Norma wants to write her. Who knows?

12/18/1944: Monday again and the new school list should be out tomorrow. A buddy I know got a crew assignment after his school. I hope to get a ship after my next school training. The sooner I go to sea, the sooner the war will be over and the sooner I get home to my darling. I wonder if I have actually said the big "I Love YOU" in any of my letters. I know I say 'With All My Love' at the close but have I ever said it right out? Those big three words?

Oh, I just got mail and there was a Christmas card from Norma. It had a pen in it. I write her so often maybe she thinks I am about out of ink. Or maybe, she thinks it will improve my handwriting. Sorry darling, it won't.

12/19/1944: The list is out and I am assigned to a school. Not the one I had hoped for, but one to get me on a ship, I hope. It is training to recognize warplanes and ships. Got to know which are ours or enemy ones. This would have come in handy when I was on the *SS Collis P. Huntington* and we shot at the British Sunderland Flying Boat.

I think I will be doing a lot of studying. I only get weekend liberty with an assignment to a school.

12/20/1944: What to write here in my journal and in a letter to my darling. There is not much happening. Her letter today was about her worrying again. She is worried about getting everything done before Christmas and what others will say. I need to tell her not to worry about what other people say and take it easy.

12/21/1944: Another day but school starts tomorrow. I am glad to be doing something useful other than physical training and seamanship. I got another letter today from Norma. She is putting up their Christmas tree. I think doing the tree is the most fun activity at Christmas. I wish I was there to help her. She also said she makes great muffins. I wish I was there to taste them. Actually, I just wish I was there.

12/22/1944: Its Friday after class. This training will take a lot more studying than I thought. The weather is very cold and it looks like it is trying to snow. Glad to be indoors all day in class. The goal is to identify 90 planes while they are flying in the sky. This a four-week class and the scuttlebutt is the test will be a timed one. Tomorrow will be four years since Mother passed and I hope Marie received the card I got for her to give Dad.

On a happier note, Norma said she is happy I am okay and intends to have a good Christmas even if I am far away. She will still miss me. My plan is to attend church at 1000 hour on Christmas. She wants me to give her suggestions for her (or our?) Cedar Hope Chest. What do I know about such things! I would just get something she likely already has now. Maybe hers will wear out before I get home permanently. Why ask me?

12/23/1944: I have a long weekend off. I can be gone until 0730 hours on Tuesday. I just don't have my sweetheart here to be with over those days. I don't know what I will do with all that time. Next weekend is the same with New Years. If I could get an out-of-bounds pass, I could make a quick trip to see my darling. The out-of-bounds pass is for going beyond the 20-mile limit. It mostly goes to married guys with families.

I guess I will write Norma, wash clothes and scrub my hammock for a fun filled weekend.

12/25/1944: Well, it's finally Christmas. Another one away from family and my darling. I received gifts. A wonderful letter from Norma and a Christmas card from her parents. She does have really swell folks. She still thinks the O.D. is a red-head. She should know that she can trust me even if I am a sailor. She is my one and only. Wish she could make it here to visit but it would be a very miserable trip.

12/26/1944: I just thought of something for her Hope Chest! Except is not a thing but an 'action' I will put into effect when next I see her. That ought to pique her interest! The day has been miserable with cold, bone chilling rain. I think snow would be better.

12/27/1944: It is late. These Wednesday evening classes lasting until 2100 hour are tough. I am beginning to see planes and ships in my sleep. I am not getting a restful night at all. In the past few days, we had 30 planes to know with a test today. They had 20 planes on the test and would flash them on the wall for ½ second and you have to write down what you saw. I think I did well for the short time we had spent on learning them.

Maybe writing something to Norma will relax me and get me to dream, not about planes but of her.

12/28/1944: Got letters today from my sister Marie and Norma. I really don't have time to write to them. But I want to tell my darling how much I want to be in her life forever. I just don't know the words and I don't want to put it a letter. I want to do it in person! She said she had a nice Christmas. Still, I can't write a long one because I have wash and studying to do.

12/29/1944: I need to write Norma but it will be short. It is late and soon to be lights out. I have helped clean and scrub this hut for tomorrow's inspection. The continuing rain doesn't help. I do want to go on liberty to Norfolk after the inspection. O'Reilly is expected to be in Norfolk and we have plans to meet. He was with me on the *SS Mobilgas* and the *SS Thomas Scott*. Great guy. I hope she remembers he is a 'he' and not a red-head 'she'.

Her last letter said she had gotten lot of things for her Hope Chest. Sounds like a wonderful New Year is coming our way.



ATB (Amphibious Training Base) News, Camp Bradford, N.O.B. Norfolk, VA. Vol II, No. 29, December 29, 1944, Read by Ray when he was stationed there.



*Dude Ranch, 1518 Monticello near 16th street,
#1 is Joe, #2 is Joiner, #3 is Ray, #4 is Conoise in Norfolk.
Celebrating Ray's 23rd birthday on Saturday 12/30*

12/31/1944: Wow, another Sunday is almost gone and so is my birthday. Joe celebrated it with me and some buddies in Norfolk. I was happy to see him. Of course, I was planning to write letters while sitting around the USO in town but Joe didn't let me. We had a good time talking about old ship times. Can't tell Norma we had a good time. We did go to a movie as well. With all the rain, I would not be lying to tell her it was miserable.

I hope this New Year will bring Norma and I closer together. I hear the war continues to progress well but still not over. Maybe the war will be over by year's end, so I will be home for good with my beautiful girl! But right now, I feel 23 years old and lonesome.

1/01/1945: Another beautiful rainy Monday. The cold comes and goes which makes it difficult to be warm. I need to write a speech for class tomorrow on a specific airplane.

I hate talking in front of others. I am not good at it. But it has to be done and like Dad always says, "Do your best at whatever you do or don't do it". So, I will try my best. I miss Norma. I will try to think of something new to write. I am sure she gets tired of hearing how I miss her or wish she was here. At least my journal doesn't get tired of me repeating my love for her.

Still getting updates of action on the wallboard postings. Navy action seems to be very intense in the Pacific. One listing said these Kamikazes, pilots who are suicide diving at our ships, are doing serious damage. Just after Christmas, a posting said, the **SS John Burke** was carrying ammo and exploded when hit by Kamikazes, killing all 40 merchant sailors and 28 Armed Guardsmen. Terrible.

1/02/1945: Recognition class has gotten to be like grade school. You get a bunch of guys together and any serious subject goes out the window. The trainer has been somewhat understanding. I did get a letter today from Norma. Seems she had to work a lot during the holiday rush. She sent a birthday card with a great verse about wishing we were together. I wish the same thing darling.

1/04/1945: I was so tired after my Wednesday evening class; I didn't write a letter to Norma. In a way, it was good because today I received a package of stationary with my name and US Navy in the header. I feel like rich guy now. The card and letter with it were like seeing a spring Bluebird brightening your day. So, what do I write on this fancy stationary? Even during the day, I see her often. I have her picture in my wallet, so every time I show my ID at the cafeteria or the canteen, I see her. Her first picture to me is always on my bunk so I look on it as I fall asleep. Do miss her very much.

I will be glad when school is over. These planes are starting to look all the same. When we discuss as a class what they flash on the wall, most of us get it wrong. But I am having fun and the speech I gave wasn't too bad.

1/05/1945: I got a nice letter from Norma today. That made a long day better. I will have class again tomorrow until 1600 hours. If we are chosen as the 'Honor Platoon' we get released at 1300 hours. I will write my darling about my weekend in Norfolk with some buddies, celebrating my birthday. I will also tell her I was back on base at the expected time of 2200 hours Sunday. I did miss services.

1/07/1945: Almost two weeks have passed for school and less than two left. Starting to go fast now that I am getting to understand how to look at these planes.

I don't know why but I keep thinking of how I missed her over the past holidays. She could have help celebrate my birthday. Maybe it's because I just read two new letters from her. I remember how she would tickle my ear and it would drive me crazy. Oh well, can't change the past, only the future. I think I need to see what Marie wrote before I forget about my family.

1/09/1945: I have a tight schedule so I better write Norma. After I write her, I need to wash clothes and pray for hot water when I take a shower. Most of the time, there is none. I could write about school. We got five new planes today making a total of seventy to know. I think twenty more new planes to go before the exam. I am told we will be going to the Naval Air Station on Thursday the 12th. I think they want to test us on real planes flying overhead. Then I want to go to Norfolk on Saturday to get pictures taken. So, Ray, stop writing in this journal and write Norma so you can wash clothes. Move it sailor!

1/11/1945: I spent the day at the Air Station but the cold morning prevented anyone going up. Instead, everyone toured several large planes sitting at the airfield. It was interesting, I thought. Next Wednesday is the last day of Recognition School. I am seeing more planes in my sleep than I see all day in class. I do think of my sweet darling often and I need to write her. Just don't have anything of interest to write.

1/12/1945: Finally, a warm day. I was given liberty for this weekend but maybe I should stay here and study. The exam is Monday and there is not much to do in Norfolk. The test will be on sixty of the ninety planes we have been shown and hopefully learned. So, by Thursday, I will know my next assignment. I hope it is to a ship and not to another school or induction again.

1/15/1945: Well, I did go into Norfolk to have those pictures taken. I have to go back and approve the proofs, then have them printed. At least the exam is over and I think I did okay. Doesn't matter since I was told I am being assigned to a ship's crew starting this Thursday. I will be in training in camp for two weeks then spend another two weeks training on a mock-up ship in the bay. They said my actual ship is not yet ready.

Norma's last letter said her mother was sick and she had to do the housework including cooking meals. I wonder if she is as good a cook as she is beautiful. But then maybe not and I should send her dad my sympathy. She might not think it funny, if I wrote that to her. Better get writing. Need to tell her and Marie the good news about getting a ship.

1/16/1945: The ship's crew list got posted today and I did not know any of them. I guess I will start again making new friends in my Navy family. I do not know any of the officers either. I hope they are not full regulation types.

I hope Norma's mother is better and everything is improving for them.

1/18/1945: I got new quarters with the ship assignment so our crew can be together and get to know one another. And these are a lot better than what I had in camp. So far, everyone seems like a nice bunch of guys. But the officers did an inspection of our gear and seabag. I was missing two pairs of white socks. I was told to have them tomorrow and they knew I would have the money because it would be payday.

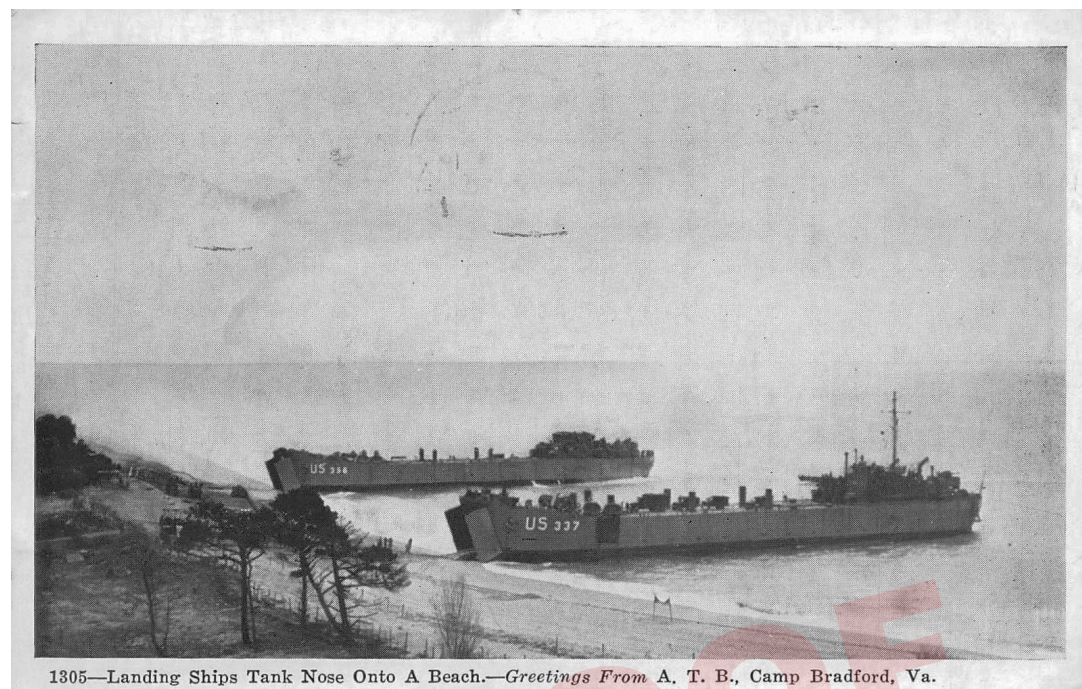
Saw another wallboard posting on action in the Pacific. More Kamikaze attacks. The **SS Lewis L. Dyche**, carrying bombs and ammo, was hit killing all hands including their 28-man Armed Guard unit. They also posted on the wallboard, my Advanced Recognition Lookout Training score of 2.97. It showed I am qualified as a specialist for Aircraft Identification. Also, I am qualified to be an instructor for Recognition Lookout Training. Sounds like I need a pay raise.

1/22/1945: What a day. My eyes are still watering. We had gas exposure drills at the Chemical Warfare Unit. I was exposed to tear gas. They also exposed us to tiny amounts of 4 different deadly gases so we can recognize their smell before we die and be able to put on protection. That was my morning. I didn't die but I felt like I was dying for a while.

Afternoon was more to my liking. I was training for two hours on a mockup of a LST (landing ship tank) on the beach. We learned our general battle stations, fire & rescue stations and others. Then we saw a training film for an hour. When it started to rain, they let us skip physical training exercise and sent us for a dental check-up.

What a day.

Postcard dated 10-31-1944 showing Camp Bradford training exercise.



Then I got a letter from my darling. From the sound of it, she is checking up on me. She wants to know what is happening in Norfolk. She still doesn't understand how boring Norfolk is for me, since I have the greatest girl already. Guess I need to write her and tell her pictures of me are being done in Norfolk. That is the reason I go there. The pictures will be ready, February 5th.

On the latest war action, there was a posting about a rocket bomb hitting the Armed Guard quarters on the freighter **SS Blenheim** anchored at Antwerp. There were casualties but didn't say if any were AGs. I wonder what they mean by a 'Rocket Bomb'.

1/23/1945: Another 'What a day' it was. I was at firefighting school all day. I was learning about different types of water pumps, different types of nozzles and on what types of fires to use them. There was a round tank about 15 feet across and about 4 foot high, filled with oil. They would set it on fire and have us approach it to put it out with various spray nozzles.

Very exhausting but I need to write something to Norma, hopefully a short one, and then wash my smokey duds.

1/24/1945: Another long day and I would prefer to sleep right now. But I got 2 letters from Norma and one from Marie. I better write them back. Let's see, Norma wants to know what color she would look best in wearing. I saw a picture in a magazine of a sky-blue dress with white ruffles along the edges. I liked it a lot. I notice her stamp on the letter was put on upside-down. I will have to ask her about it. When I do it, I have a lovely good reason.

The scuttlebutt around here is there will be no liberty after training but we will be going to the ship located in Chicago. Maybe I will get 'delayed orders'. If they tell me to be in Chicago in 15 days and it only takes me three or four days, I can stop off in Cincinnati on the way to see my Darling. Just as long as I am in Chicago on time.

1/25/1945: Another nice day with the sun shining but it is still cold outside. One reason I was glad, we did Aircraft Recognition review for four hours this morning. It was inside and warm. After lunch mess, we had two and half hours of class on chemical warfare before going to the gas unit.

I went through the chamber filled with chlorine gas. It was choking but I did as I was told and did not suffer much. This training is important since gases were used often in the last war and might be again. I hope my darling doesn't get too worried over this training. Maybe I won't tell her.

I still wonder why she wanted to know my favorite color for a dress. If she really wanted to know what I like and don't like, it's when her hair is put in an up-swept manner shown in her picture. I guess it is the fashion these days.

I wonder if she remembers when we were holding each other and the light bulb burned out. God could not have timed it better. I better get to writing letters or this evening will go on forever.

1/26/1945: I need to get two letters written. One to Marie, what a great sister I have, telling her she will be getting the pictures I had taken in Norfolk. I want her to have copies made for Norma and the brothers using the money I have been sending home. If possible, she could go to Kresges and give the picture directly to Norma. Then I need to write my darling telling her the plan.

Norma mentioned a 'Jerry' in her last letter. Was she the one with us when I brought Wally along with me, when we went out together? I can't quite remember. I wonder where Wally has gone off to as well. Not much to write.

We did physical training out in the cold, right after breakfast. Then had a film on the 'Look-out' for danger. Then out to the LST mockup all before mess. At least for the afternoon, we were inside practicing to be on 'look-out'. I felt silly doing it, after all the watches I have stood on liberty ships.

I did catch a look at the postings wall and there is rarely good news. It's those kamikazes. Some hit the *SS Wescott* and flying debris wounded half the Armed Guard unit. But hurray for the Armed Guard on the *SS David Dudley Field* whose firing made the kamikazes barely touch their ship. The *SS Van Buren* was torpedoed by a German sub blowing three gunner's mates of the 5-inch gun, overboard, killing them. Sad, very sad.

1/27/1945: Another tiring day of training. By 0700 hour, we were on our way out towards Dam Neck to learn how to fire different types of guns. I knew most of guns since I was a trained GM3c. We stayed out on the water until 1630 hour. We are scheduled to do this for the next three days. I need to write my sweetheart but I am dead tired. Still, I promised to write so get to it Raymond.

1/28/1945: Being Sunday made no difference as we were back out on firing practice again. They did stop at 1430 hour. This gave me more time to rest. I need to write Norma. I need to let her know I was kidding about her checking up on me here in Virginia.

I don't know what a 'page-boy' hair style looks like but I hope it is better than the up-pity one she had. She seems to like changing her hair style.

1/29/1945: After tomorrow we will be done on the firing range at Dam Neck and the scuttlebutt is we will be out of Camp Bradford for the next two weeks.

She still has not answer my question about why she wanted to know what color dress I liked her wearing. Yet, she wants to know why I would put the stamp upside down. When I do use stamps, the upside-down is to say 'I love you very much'. But she needs to answer my question about the dress color, first.

1/30/1945: I thought they would ease up on our last firing range practice. Instead they kept us until 2100 hour lecturing about anti-aircraft guns. And on our last night here.

Also, my letter to Norma came back due to short postage. Here in the states, it is eight cents. I will add two 3 cent stamps and send it air-mail. I wonder if the other letter was short of postage.

Tomorrow, I will be out of camp and on a ship in the bay for two weeks. It will be a nice change and I will pretend we are out on the ocean. Now if my clothes would wash themselves, I could call it a night. I guess we will have mail service on the ship. Maybe, maybe not.

1/31/1945: Finally, I am aboard a ship. They gave us the day to get to know the ship layout and to stow our gear. This will be my first Navy vessel since the *USS Crosby* in 1941. Now I am in the 'NAVY' not as a Navy Armed Guard on a rented supply Liberty ship. On here, everyone is Navy.

So far, the supper was good and the ship speakers are hooked to the mess hall radio. You can hear the music everywhere onboard. The ship is a real LST and not like the mockup we trained on the beach at Camp Bradford. Also, there are a bunch of guys on this ship and not like the thirty or less on a Liberty ship. I am told my new ship will have over a hundred sailors with several officers.

The skipper said our next ship will be an LST converted to a 'Repair and Salvage' ship. He added, we will spend a month in Newport, Rhode Island training for that ship. The rest I was hearing onboard was just scuttlebutt. One guy I have met was also part of the Armed Guard. He served on the *SS Burton* and the *SS Harlan* before being sent here to Camp Bradford. His name is Paul Clifford Shultz. We played some basketball together. He said to call him Cliff.

I have four days to mail any letters before we leave out. I better make sure Norma understands it might be awhile before she gets any more letters. Otherwise, she will worry something bad has happened to me.

2/01/1945: I was up at 0630 to eat at 0700 and we mustered on the tank deck where they would normally carry armored tanks for delivery on the beach. I slept until 1200, then awoke for dinner. After eating I did nothing until 1430 hour, where we mustered again on the tank deck. They broke us up into our duty groups, we got another tour of the ship and shown our work locations. I am a gunner and to the guns we went. There seemed to be many different duty groups.

We ate chow at 1730 hour. Afterwards they opened the canteen. I bought a few cigars. Smoked one as I relaxed leaning on the ship's railing. If this is what it's like on a Navy vessel, I don't want to go back to Liberty ships. I am sitting in the mess hall now, listening to music over the speakers and thinking what to write to Norma. Journal, you are not helping me with this.

2/03/1945: Another day of being up at 0630, eat at 0700 and mustered on the tank deck. Did some drills and that was all for the morning activity. After a good dinner, I washed my clothes and napped for 2 hours. I love Saturdays aboard this ship. Then I got up, ate supper and played some basketball. Got a nice hot shower and even shaved. I am in the pink of condition and feeling fine. Still, I need to write Norma. My 'sweets' is expecting a letter written every day even if I am unable to mail them for some time.

2/04/1945: Sunday. I slept through breakfast until 0800. After dressing, I was called to muster. There was a general quarters alarm sounded for a fire drill. Then we had a simulated beach landing without leaving our dock position. We did not perform very well doing either drill. In the afternoon, we did another drill and then I slept until I heard mail had come aboard. I got my letters for Norma and rushed to have them sent. I got two lovely letters from my darling in return. I need to write her but I do not know how to put into words what I want to say. I want to say something like 'us together forever' or 'can we be one' or 'I never want to be apart from you'.

2/05/1945: We have now begun our actual ship training by pulling away from the docks of Little Creek. In the bay they set sea watch duties and I was assigned the 1600-2000 hour. In the afternoon, we had a fire drill and then I tried to get some sleep before my sea watch at 1600 hour. But the MA was going to inspect our quarters so I had to be up. At 1800 hour we anchored in the bay, so I was secured from watch duty. I was happy because the weather was really cold.

So, I ate supper, which was terrible and decided to wash some dungarees. Just as I was getting the wash going, they sound the collision alarm. It was a drill. Afterwards, I went to finish my wash. I need to finish this journal entry and write a letter to Norma. It is nice to have a warm place like this mess hall to write letters.



The long ramp is called a 'Rhino'.

2/06/1945: Today was the same. Up at 0630, eat at 0700, mustered on the tank deck. Then the rest of the morning we were under a general quarters alarm, meaning I was to be at my gun position. We practiced beach landings. After the first landing in the afternoon, gun crews were secured from their positions and given free time. Some of us were shown how to play a different kind of 'football'. It was interesting but the football was shaped weird.

In the evening after chow, we tied up to the flag ship of our group and watched a movie at 2000 hour on their deck. It was an old movie but nice one. It is now 2200. If I was at my 'sweets' house, I would only have thirty minutes to catch the bus home.

I need to write her before I fall asleep. Just another six or eight days and there will be a mail call with letters from her.

2/07/1945: A nice sunny day. The breakfast was pretty good, too. We had an 0930 general quarters alarm and I was off to my battle station. We fired at surface targets all morning. I think we did well. In the afternoon, we fired at radio-controlled airplanes catapulted off a small craft next to us. We again did well I think but the clean-up of the gun station was work. All the empty shells had to be stored in canisters. I was glad Cliff knew what do being an old armed guard man. He is helpful and doesn't need supervision.

We did get done soon enough to be able to lay around for 2 hours until chow time. I can't wait until we are on our own ship searching out the enemy and salvaging / repairing damaged ships. Well, its Norma writing time as I promised to do. Someday I will show her how much I love her.

2/08/1945: Today was very foggy and misty so we spent the morning tying up to another LST anchored in the bay. Then we would untie, circle around and do it again. All morning until chow time where we stayed tied up together. After chow we were the anchored LST and they circled us to tie up. All I was told to do was to secure the mooring lines to the bitts. I guess I better write something to Norma now, as tomorrow is expected to be a real workout I am told.



Bitts aboard ships (sometime called cable-bitts) were large vertical round metal items mortised into the keel and used as the anchor cable or mooring line attachment point.

Bitts are carefully manufactured and maintained to avoid any sharp edges which might chafe and weaken the mooring lines.

2/09/1945: Being part of the Ordinance Group has its advantages. We sat most of the day watching the Deck Group practice refueling while underway at sea. I think they did a good job. At 1600 hour, everyone including me, had drills until 1730. We then cleaned up for chow. Now I am trying to write my 'sweets' but my handwriting looks very ugly for even me to read.

2/10/1945: Saturday. We did the circling, tying up and doing it again and again. I think we did it ten times. In the afternoon, we anchored and they did the circling, tying up and repeat the routine. The day did end good with a movie on the Flag ship because our projector is broke. It was '**When Irish Eyes are Smiling**' which I had seen before but it did help pass the evening. Now I need to end writing in this journal and write to Norma everything I just wrote in my journal. *See Editor's Movie Info at the end of this document.*

2/11/1945: I had a lazy day. I did wash clothes but then I slept most of the afternoon. This evening someone decided we needed to run the ship up on the beach for practice. Timing is everything I am told. When we tried to back off the beach, we couldn't. The tide had gone out. We are stranded until the tide comes back in to lift us off the beach. So, I thought I would write in the journal and get a letter written to my sweetheart. When the tide does come back in, about 0100, I will be fast asleep.

More good news is; I have only two more days on this tub. On Wednesday, I will be ashore and ready to get my sack full of letters from Norma, maybe even Marie, too.

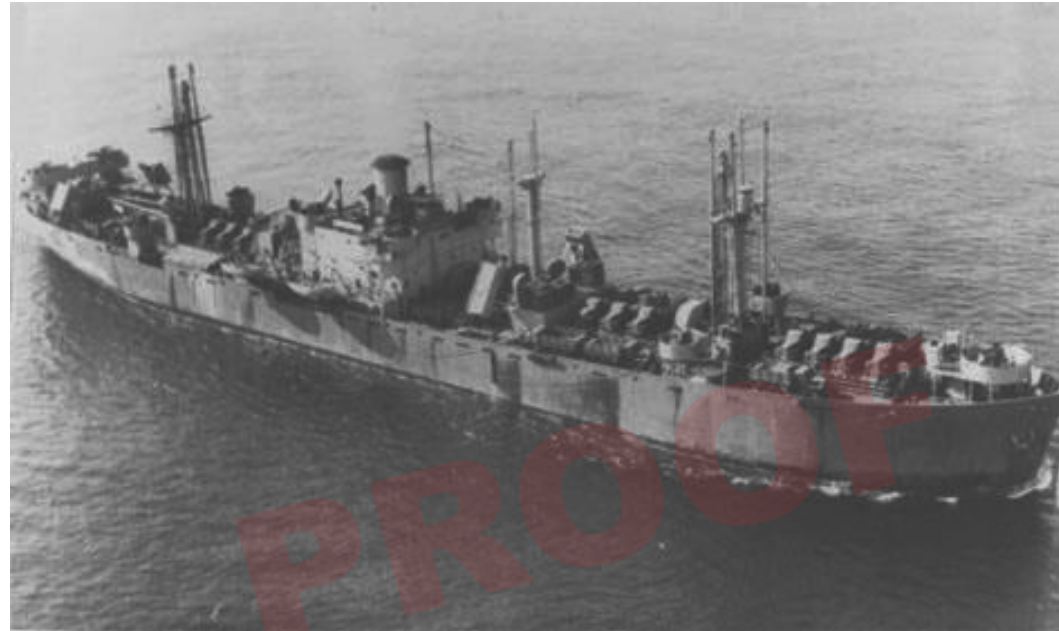
2/12/1945: Sometimes I think I write the same thing every day in this journal and in my letters. It is just not in me to write interesting things or to try and change things up differently.

Tomorrow, we will return to the Little Creek dock. Other than standing a short watch, there is nothing exciting to report. I did do some wash. I do miss my love. If I can just find the words to say how much I love her. How I want to be with her forever. Hopefully, the good Lord will get me home to her before my next overseas duty.

2/13/1945: I have run out of ink in my pen. I wonder if Cliff will lend me a pen to write in my journal and a letter to Norma.

As you can tell, I am writing and Cliff is a nice guy for allowing the use of his pen. I wonder if Norma will notice the different ink when I write her a letter. On top of my ink shortage, this day was the nastiest with cold, rain and fog. I couldn't see much when I stood watch. We needed a tug to bring us into the Little Creek docks. Got there about the 1700 hour. At least tomorrow is mail call and I hope for four or five letters from my Darling!

2/15/1945: I was off the ship to mail my letters. But I have spent more time in sick bay I think, than in my bunk. I did stop to see some wall postings, but the news was not all good. The **SS Peter Silvester** was torpedoed by a German sub off the coast of Australia in the Indian Ocean. It had a twenty-six Armed Guard unit, all perished. What's a German sub doing in Jap waters? I am still feeling ill and I have yet to read all of the eight letters from Norma and one from Marie.



SS Peter Silvester, sunk February 6, 1945.

2/17/1945: I am starting to feel better with this cold, so I need to write Norma after this journal entry. I write here first because it helps my thinking when I write her. I guess this is the first night I am not sitting in sick-bay since our return to the docks.

I am told the crew will be going to Newport, Rhode Island for a month's training. Our ship, being built in Jeffersonville, Indiana, will be commissioned on April 20th. It would be nice if I can get a delayed order when heading to the ship. If I did, I could easily go through home on the way to Indiana. Meanwhile, I am still doing the routine activities on the LST. Standing watches and scrubbing gun areas, head facilities and deck areas. I am now part of a ship's crew, not just a gunner anymore.

I have found a card partner who is the baker on the ship. Always good to have a friend in the kitchen for that late night cup of coffee. His name is Edward Byrne but said to call him Ed. He is familiar with the game of cribbage. That was the game I won a cigar off my commander, Lt Panaccion, on the **SS Mobilgas**. It is nice to find someone who knows the game. Makes the time go by. While having coffee and playing cards, I learned the **USS Cooper**, his brother's ship, was sunk in Ormac Bay the same day Ed enlisted. It was December 3, 1944. I am thankful my brothers have survived so far in this war.



Aerial view of the port side, USS Cooper (DD-695), while underway. When hit by a torpedo, it rolled, split in half and sank in less than a minute.

2/18/1945: I got one letter from Norma today. It was sweet and lovely. She said she had a wonderful day off from work. I will write her about our possibly leaving for Newport by the end of the week. We are going as a crew assigned to the new ship. We will train together. At long last, a ship.

2/19/1945: I need to reply to my sweetheart's question about where her picture is that I had taken in Norfolk. Now how do I explain my being out on the bay training and not able to get those pictures? I did send a letter to the studio before we left out on the fourth of February. I explained my situation and asked them to send the photos to my sister. Then at the same time, I wrote Marie asking her to send a picture to Norma or maybe even take it to her at SS Kresges. Hopefully, she will have the picture by the time she gets a letter explaining all this.

Maybe I should try to telephone her when I go ashore on Wednesday. If I write a letter to let her know about my calling, she will get it after I would be calling. Today is Monday, so it is a poor plan to let her know in a letter. I will just have to risk and call hoping she will be there. Life sure is complicated having a sweetheart. I think this next letter to Norma will be the end of my stationary she had gotten me, with my name and Navy heading.

2/21/1945: Got ashore at 1300 hour and made my planned call to Norma. As soon as I heard her voice, I lost all ability to say what I couldn't say in my letters. Still, it was nice to hear her voice. We talked about her family and what is happening at SS Kresges. I did explain the picture situation. She hasn't gotten it yet from Marie but I will check on it when I call Marie. When I next called Marie there was no answer. I remembered Marie said in her last letter about maybe moving to a new place. I hope she writes me with the address and telephone number if it had changed.

2/24/1945: It is Saturday. I wrote my letter to Norma when I went into Norfolk. I went to the USO and used their stationary, so I wrote it while I was there. Mailed it there too. I apologized for repeating myself when I called her. Got to work on my nerve to tell her what I truly feel and my desire to be together forever. Now why couldn't I say that on the phone. Next time I will write it down and just read it to her.

2/26/1945: I am happy! I just found several sheets with my name and Navy in the heading. I am writing in this journal during my watch. I will write Norma after this. Hopefully, this will be my last watch at Camp Bradford. We will be leaving for Newport tomorrow. That's the scuttlebutt I hear. Also, we will be getting our ship on April 20th in Jeffersonville, Indiana. Some of the officers are going directly to Indiana from here. After I get off watch, I need to remember to prepare some of my gear for packing in my seabag.

2/27/1945: I have received my transfer to the Naval Training Station, Newport, Rhode Island for training and assignment to ARS(T)-2. Yeah! We left Camp Bradford today about 1800 hour, caught the Cape Charles Ferry at 1900 hour and reached Cape Charles to catch the train headed to Newport. I am writing in this journal while riding on the train. Our crew just about filled most of the passenger cars

2/28/1945: We all arrived in Newport about 1100 this morning. Then everyone had a physical, haircut, dental check and an X-ray (my first since boot-camp). Then we were showed our quarters, I then unpacked my seabag and hammock for an inspection. Regulation guys all the way at this station.

We were all told this will be a 'Pre-Commissioning Training' for our new ship the *USS Okala*. The training will involve night vision testing, swimming, strength testing, firefighting and rifle range using small arms. It will be six weeks of hard work.

2/30/1945: Monday. They organized us into various rating groups. There is a group of electricians, various types of machinists group, the quartermaster with his guys handling supplies, cooks with their stewards to serve the officers' needs and the communications group of radio men. Of course, there is the group of seamen for the various chores needed to man the ship. They are the ones for handling the deck duties like docking chores.

Cliff, although just rated a seaman was placed with me in ordinance when he is needed, due to his Armed Guard experience handling guns.

And what a group of gunners. Our chief is John Hayes, who will lead the group. On Liberty ships, we had a commander who was our direct leader. Sometimes, we had a coxswain to manage our duties each day who reported to our commander. But this ship is all Navy personnel. I learned there were at least six or more coxswains on this ship to manage all the various crew assignments.

Along with John, I met Bob Novak and Bob Wallace. I guess I will be told what name to call each to avoid confusion. Novak is a GM3 like myself and he has rank over Wallace, who is new being just a GM seaman. Novak is older, too. The higher rated gunner, GM1, is Obie Weedle. He right off the bat, said to call him "Obie", not Weedle.

Well journal, that is all I remember of names from today. There are going to be a lot of names to remember with this big group.



James Edward Ford, plank owner and one of several coxswains serving on the USS Okala.

3/01/1945: I need to write Norma and tell her where I am with the new address. Also, I must let her know what the past few days have been like. They are very by the book here. No tailored uniforms permitted, only navy issued and no non-issued navy clothing of any kind.

The next six weeks will be tough. I am told there will be no liberty during this time and commissioning is scheduled for the 20th of April. Let's see the address is a long one, N.T.S. Group 345, General Delivery Bldg. 4102 in Newport.

3/02/1945: I finished my duty as 'Junior Officer of the day' at 2000 hour. I mostly sat in the office waiting for any messages to be delivered to someone of importance. Mostly, I just sat around. I did type, yes typed with my two little fingers, a letter to 'Beautiful'. Had to change the address I gave her because they said it was wrong. I was told to use Okala Detail, (A.R.S.T -2) since this is the ship's name we are here, learning to operate. I did have to use my own envelope since I could not find any in the office.

3/03/1945: We are doing nothing but laying around waiting for our officers to arrive and take command of our detail. We had a movie tonight. The movie was good. It was Abbott & Costello in "**Here comes the Co-eds**". I need to remember to write Norma and the family tomorrow. Movie nights run late and I have no time to write letters. *See Editor's Movie Info at the end of this document.*

3/04/1945: I had the weekend off but I am too broke to go ashore. I just stayed here on base. It was nice to sleep until 1030 hour but then I missed breakfast. So, I waited for lunch. Shultz and I met a guy named Walter Pershing Doe who said to call him Walt. He was sitting on a stool carving on a piece of wood. He said he was part of the carpenters group. I asked why we would need a carpenter on a ship of metal.

His reply was "You might need a wood beam of the right length for bracing some structure in place so it could be welded". Sounded good to me, so we invited him to go with us. The three of us went to the drill hall on base, to play some basketball.

I saw the wall posting of Navy action on the way to the drill hall. Again, some bad news. The **SS Henry Bacon** was straggling behind a convoy. This reminded me of the **SS Meriwether Lewis** being sunk for straggling behind. The Armed Guard defended bravely and seven of the twenty-six died. Ships nearby rescued the survivors as the ship sank.

When we were done with basketball, we went back to the barracks where I had a nice HOT shower, shaved and even washed some clothes. I need to stop writing here and write a letter to my sweetheart so I can go to the movies on base later tonight.

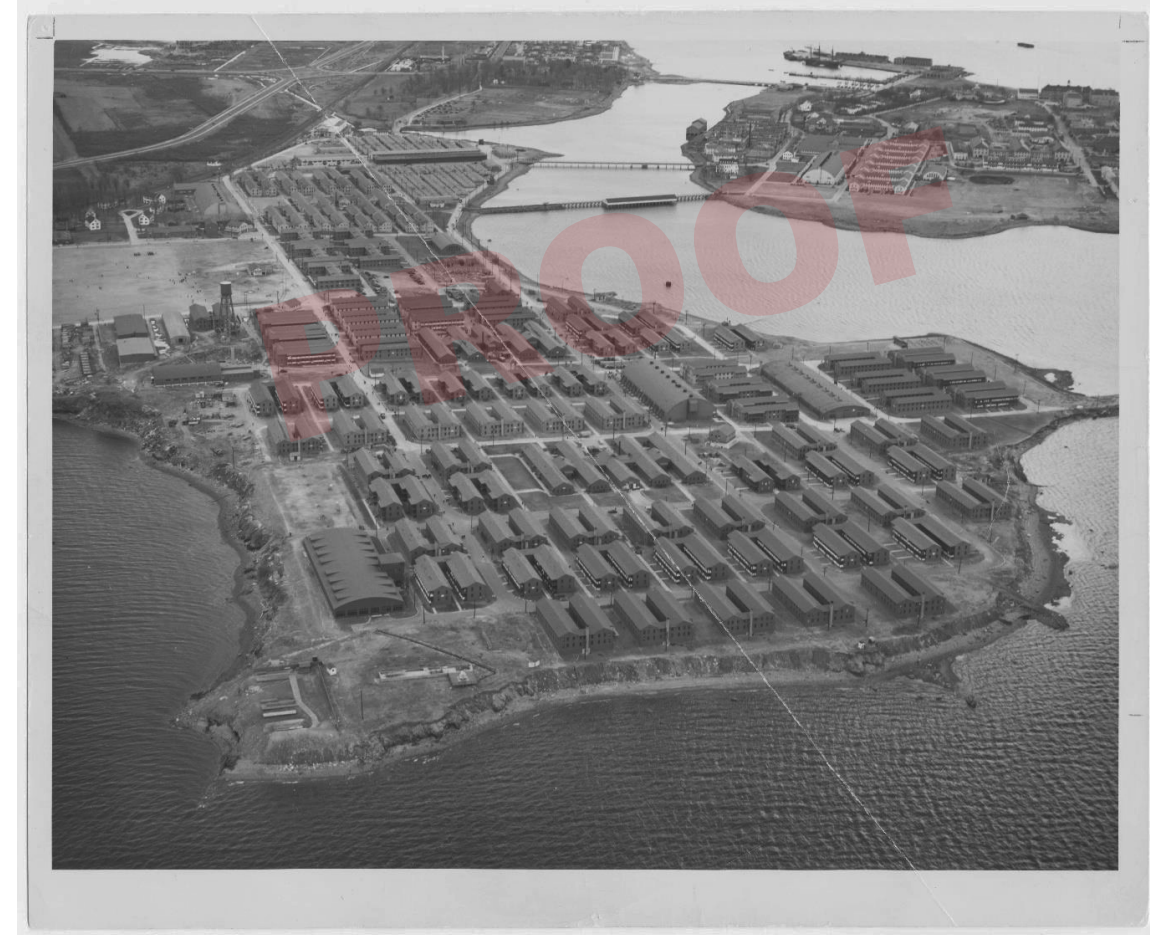
3/05/1945: I was back at my 'Junior Officer of the Day' duties and again typed Norma a letter. If I get duty enough times, I might be able to type nicely.

One of our executive officers, Joe Baxter, showed up on base today and asked how everyone was doing. He said the rest of the officers will be arriving soon. He also said he will look into getting some liberty for us after our training but made no promises.

Then we drilled for an inspection to occur on Saturday. After chow, we had a base officer lecture us on the penalties for violating the base regulations. This took him an hour. He then had us scrub the room until 1600 hour. Then we watched a film on first aid. This may be a normal day around Newport.

Now I am still on watch and I took some time to type Norma another letter. I do miss her very much and want to be with her the rest of my life. The mail must still be mixed up, since I received no letters from her. I hope they get it fixed soon.

I do dream about reaching those 'fifty-ones' we do at the bus stop when I leave her house. I can't remember where we left off last time. Maybe fifteen or twenty. This time there were envelopes for my letter in the desk drawer.



Aerial view of a portion of Coddington Point, showing more than 200 Quonset huts for housing at the Newport N. T. S., September 1944. Coasters Harbor Island in the background (Naval War College Museum)

3/08/1945: All of us had to lock-up our gear in sea-going fashion because they are moving us to different barracks. As I was waiting for the truck to transport everyone to the new location, I wrote a short letter to my darling. I got a letter from her yesterday. It was the first since arriving here. I hope she forgives me for not writing every day. I had to finish the letter quickly as the truck showed up. Now, I am sitting in my new 'hut' thinking how blessed I am to have her love me. I miss her deeply.

3/11/1945: I haven't written anyone for over a week it seems. I got only one letter from Norma since I have arrived here and it came from Camp Bradford. I better write one today. Just not much to write about. Same training as we got on the LST in Virginia. Only difference is this ship has cranes and booms for salvaging work and loading equipment. They have us working on a poolside platform to learn the different type of booms there will be onboard.

What is nice at this base is every regiment has their own drill hall. They use it for movies, roller skating and stage plays. Last Thursday the Elks Club did a show in our hall. It was very nice. If I get a letter written to Norma now, I can see tonight's movie of "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn." Well Ray, stop writing here and get that letter wrote so you won't miss the movie. See Editor's Movie Info at the end of this document.

3/13/1945: I got my evaluation on my swimming skill level. Seems I am just a 3rd class swimmer. Still this meant I could jump from a 10 ft. high tower and swim 70 yards. Also, I could swim 15 yards on my back and tread water or stay afloat for 60 seconds. Hopefully, this is enough to stay alive when my ship is sunk and to be rescued.

I asked the training officer on behalf of myself and some other Gunner's mates if we could brush up on our firing skills. He promised we would get one practice a day in the gun shed to help us. Not much time but every little bit helps.

I need to get a letter written to Norma right now because I have a big basketball game tomorrow and we need to practice. We have been practicing for a week. Overall, the weather and the day itself has been very nice. Winning that game would make tomorrow a great day!

3/15/1945: Yesterday we practiced until 1700 hour, then had chow. I learned the team we played against in basketball last night was also training for an assignment to a salvage LST. Theirs is the ARS(T)-1 called the **Laysan Island**. We are the ARS(T)-2 called the **Okala**. As terrible as our team played, they were worse. I think the score was 25 to 12. Our next game is Monday the 19th.

The mail situation seems to be fixed as I got 4 letters from Norma and one from Marie. Sweetheart wants to know what the ARS(T)-2 means. I will tell her it means 'Auxiliary Salvage and Repair Tender #2'. It really says I will be doing a lot of work onboard. Not like the Liberty ships I served upon. I need to tell her to remove the question mark on her comment "Just think you belong to me?" in her letter. I will write to make it a definite yes, I do forever belong to her.

3/21/1945: Nothing new, same routine drills, same miserable weather. At least I will continue to be part of the Ordnance Group manning the guns. Everyone is just waiting for April 12th so we can leave for Jeffersonville, Indiana. Our commissioning date has been moved up to April 15th. I couldn't be happier to finally get on a ship and back out on the ocean.

I will need to tell Darling it will be unlikely for me to get by home. Not enough time. Maybe, if I stay in Indiana for a few weeks, she and I could meet up on a weekend. I wonder how close Jeffersonville is to Cincinnati. The last I heard was the ship is being checked out near Chicago. I need to let her know the situation. She won't be happy.

3/22/1945: I thought Camp Bradford was cold but Newport is worse. The weather has been terrible for several days. It has been raining since yesterday morning. We went to Price's Neck for gunnery practice yesterday but the weather was so bad we were unable to fire a shot. It was 1900 hour before we got back to our hut. Today, the same weather had us inside the gun shed learning the guns we will have on our new ship.

3/24/1945: Time seems to be flying past when all I do is train and play basketball every day. Then there are the movies, too. Tonight, the sky is very beautiful with the stars and moon. Makes me think of my girl as I was walking back from the movie. Reminds me of when she and I were walking back to her house one evening. Except with her at my side, the sky seemed more beautiful. I should write her about how the sky is so pretty tonight.

3/26/1945: It is late and I am very tired. We played Brewerton in basketball and got crushed 36 to 18. Of course, they have been together for over thirty games and not lost any of them. It was only our third. At least the weather is nice and it is starting to warm-up. I need to stop writing in this journal and write a letter to Norma before lights-out. Gosh, I am tired.

4/01/1945: Today is Easter Sunday. After getting up at 0930 hours and cleaning up, I had a wonderful Easter dinner. It was also 'April Fool's Day' but no one took advantage of it because it was Easter, I think. Since it was warm and sunny, Cliff and I went for a walk around the station. We sat and watch some guys playing softball for a while. When I got back to the hut, I washed my clothes which I seem to do often. At supper, I heard the movie playing tonight on base is called '**One Romantic Night**'. I have got write 'sweets' when I get back and tell her about the movie. I hope I remember.

The movie was very good and makes me think how much I miss 'Beautiful'. I wonder if I would be out-of-line saying in my letter, "I love you forever" and "I am always thinking of you". Well, I better end here and start on that letter while I feel so 'loving'. *See Editor's Movie Info at the end of this document.*

4/04/1945: Got a letter today from my Darling saying she had a very nice Easter. I will reply to her letter after doing my journal tonight. I will likely tell her what a day I have had. This morning was spent entirely at the anti-aircraft shed firing at planes projected on a screen. It got boring after a while since I knew the planes would stay in the screen's border. Should I tell Norma the instructors were Waves? Maybe not, she would worry about my working too close with them.

After dinner, we spent the afternoon at the Price's Neck firing range. Before we got organized to shoot, the weather turned bad. Then we had to return all the ammunition back into storage. We didn't get back to our hut until 1930 hour.

After getting cold leftover chow, I went by the posting wall to see the latest Naval action. The **SS Oklahoma** was torpedoed in the Atlantic on its way to Africa. It was a tanker, like the **SS Mobilgas** I served aboard, carrying high-octane fuel and kerosene.

Went hit, it lit up like a very big flare. Something I always thought about when we were loaded with fuel. Half of the twenty-six Armed Guard unit died according to the posting. Sad, very sad.

4/08/1945: What a day and not in a good way. A few days ago, I learned our ship will not be ready on time, due to flooding in the shipyard of the company building it. I am still disgusted about it. I haven't written either Marie or Norma since learning the news. The scuttlebutt is the delay may be for a month or more. We do the same routine every day around here. It has become boring and disgusting, knowing we will be doing it for another month.

I guess I will force myself to write everyone the bad news. I am sure Norma will not be happy. But I do get happy when I am thinking of her and our future. If only the future would get here quicker. On no, I forgot I had finally reached the end of my fancy stationary Norma had gotten me. I will have to use the one with the Navy emblem and says United States Navy in the heading. It is all I've found available here on the base.

4/11/1945: Journal, I need you to help me think of something to write to my sweetheart. Everything I do around here has already been told to her more than once. I guess I can tell her the ship's commissioning date is now in mid-May according to the scuttlebutt info. I have been told I will be here until May 8th. Good news if it doesn't change. But I will have to wait and see if it gets delayed again. By the time I board a ship, the war may be over. It will be a short letter for sure.

4/13/1945: Although it is Friday the 13th, it has been a wonderful day. The plants are green and blooming. The sun was out and it was getting nicely warm. This reminds me of a really nice walk with my darling when I was on liberty. All I need is the creek to make this daydream complete with her. I truly miss being with her.

One thing I do need to stop doing is going by the wallboard posting to read the latest naval events. This one today was about an attack on a tanker, *SS Atlantic States*. It was close to here, happening just off Cape Cod. There were no casualties. The Armed Guard Commander with 4 of his men stayed aboard to keep the ship trimmed until tugs could bring it into Boston. Yeah, for those guys!

In another post, the Armed Guard Commander on the *SS Logan Victory* and 2 of his men were killed by a Kamikaze attack near Okinawa.

I just got word; the President passed away yesterday. There was scuttlebutt circulating earlier today but I didn't even think he was sick. I am told there will be an 'official mourning' planned including what we are to wear. He was a great man.

4/15/1945: The plan for honoring the President is set for tomorrow. We are to be in our dress blues all day. Today was another lovely day. We had a softball game but the league season starts tomorrow night. If we get organized, we might have a team to join the league play. I hope they will permit us to dress down for the game if we are playing.

4/16/1945: I am feeling my sweetheart and I have been drifting away somehow. I think it is me because I am not writing as often to her as I should. I spend my time thinking of how much I love her to ever lose her when I should be writing her. I earnestly hope she loves me as much as I do her. I need to write what is on my mind in my next letter. I will write it now since it is all I can think about and I need to let her know.

4/17/1945: It has been very foggy all day. This kept us from classes on gunnery firing. I did get some clothes washed. I hate doing wash but it needs to be done. I will try to write a more cheerful letter today to my darling. I pray I will be able to see her before I next go to sea. I have something important I want to ask her.

4/18/1945: Well, I had to scrounge around for writing stationary again. I borrowed some from Verville. Clem keeps track of ship's stores. He had lots of letter-paper for the officers to use. Very nice paper and I thanked him for it. The day was lovely for its good weather, great stationary and a letter from Norma. It is two weeks before we leave out of here for the ship.

Our unit executive told us 'If there is any layover in Indiana, I will try to get you some leave.' No promise there will be. So what do I tell my sweetheart? If it doesn't happen, she will be unhappy. I think I will tell her our first softball game in the league is Monday the 23rd.

4/19/1945: I just had a few classes today, so I washed clothes and took a short nap. Tonight, we played the Dental Dept who were last years champs. The game was a good one. We tied in the 7th inning and we made it hard for them to win the 8th inning. The season starts Monday. From this game, I think we showed how good we are playing. Hopefully, we will improve. I'll drop sweetheart a note about the game.

4/22/1945: What a long weekend it seemed to me. I had nothing really to do. Today, I was so bored, I cleaned all my gear and still had time to do nothing. I want to write Norma but what to say. If I don't get leave before going overseas, I will be unhappy. If I say I might get home to see her, she will be unhappy if I don't get home. I can always write her about how much I love her; how I miss her terribly and may God bless her.

4/23/1945: This was a great day. I just feel great from the good chow and plenty of good exercising out in the nice weather we are having. I JUST FEEL FINE. But then, maybe it was because we won our first league softball game, twelve to two. I need to write a short letter to Norma about the good day I am enjoying.

4/25/1945: If it wasn't for a letter from my darling, it would be a very miserable day. It began to rain all afternoon since dinner and became chilly in the evening. Still, we played our scheduled league game and won nine to three. I think the other team began giving up as the weather got cold and wet along with our scoring run-up in the third inning.

I did learn we are leaving out for our ship on May 9th making the commissioning May 11th. I hope they do not change again. I will let Norma and the family know the latest.

4/29/1945: Change is the only thing consistent in this Navy unit. The scuttlebutt now is we are going someplace else before we go to the ship in Indiana. This likely ruins any chance of seeing my sweetheart before the ship sails.

I will continue to hope that an opportunity happens and I get to see her even for a short time. I remember she never answered my question about her question concerning my favorite color. Why did she need to know this? I think this is good time to write and ask her.

4/30/1945: Today was another great day. We played softball against the 'Consolation' Hospital Ship team and won over them, 23 – 12. They protested because some players of theirs were out on a training cruise for a few days but our team also had players on leave. We did offer them a practice game later in the season to help their egos.

I got more letters today, one from Marie and one from Norma. My darling wanted to know what my position was on the team. I play 3rd base because of my strong throwing arm. Tonight, I was especially good. Four for five with two triples, a double and a single. Should help my average.

Norma said she was working too hard on her day off. Does she mean around her home? My day off is relaxing and taking it easy. Maybe I would even take a nap. Yes journal, I shouldn't say that to her in my letter.

5/01/1945: I am back in the office as 'Officer of the Day' which allows me to type a letter to my darling. First, I will get my thoughts together writing about my day here in this journal. I was required to go to the classification office this morning to see if I am fit for ship duty. I guess my time on four ships was not sufficient for them. One test was math and another about solving mechanical problems. You will be classified as crazy if one gear turns right and you don't know which way the other engaged gear turns. Maybe they want to know how over three years in the Navy as affected me.

Scuttlebutt is the ship has left for Chicago and we are to leave here next week to meet up with it. Then spend a few weeks training on the ship in Chicago. Now if this is half-way true, Norma could come up for a weekend and we would look out over the lake with her in my arms. I would be the happiest guy in the world. Of course, right now I could use one of those number fifty kisses. Time is running out; I better start typing her letter.

5/07/1945: Well, so much for the scuttlebutt talk. Aboard ship I could usually trust the information. Now it seems the shipping date is still unknown. They will likely junk the ship and then reassign us all to other ships. I was just getting to know most of these guys. Like Percy L. Taylor who said to call him Perry. He was on the *USS San Francisco* in Pearl Harbor when the bombs dropped on December 7th. I was just getting out of Great Lakes Boot camp then. What is interesting is Perry is a diver and a 1st class pipe fitter. Said he is a perfect fit for a salvage and repair ship like the *USS Okala*. No pun intended he said.

Softball continues to be a good distraction from waiting to ship-out of here. Our game today was tight but we pulled away, winning 8 to 1. Two more games to win and the championship is ours. The movies on base help the frustration too.

5/09/1945: This evening I feel especially good. I think the reason is I am in love with the sweetest lady in the world. Or maybe, it's because we beat the Coast Guard at softball winning 7 to 2. They got steamed about an umpire call in our favor and they lost their focus for the rest of the game. It is both things making me happy, I believe. Our departure for the ship is now May 25th but I have doubts after so many changes. I wonder if I can get a leave during the next week or two to see Norma and the family. Doesn't hurt to ask.

5/12/1945: Instead of getting a leave, I got told to pack my seabag for shipping out Monday, the 14th to Chicago at the NTS, Navy Pier. I better send Norma a Western Union cable letting her know the change is happening now.

5/13/1945: Well, I am in the office again but not for duty assignment. I am just sitting in for Grover Neal. It should be just a short time. He takes care of all the personnel issues. But I can still type a quick letter to Norma before he gets back. I will need to use the office letterhead stationery since I wasn't planning on being in here. I didn't bring any paper Clem had given me. I did have my journal as I was on the way for coffee and writing.

I was granted a fifteen-day leave beginning earlier today. But as soon as they did it, they cancelled it because we are to leave tomorrow for Chicago. Her letter said she had May 8th off for VE day. I will have to tell her we did our normal training like every other day. I will enjoy it when the war is completely over and I can be with Norma forever. Well, better start her letter before he gets back.

5/15/1945: We arrived in Chicago at the NTS, Navy Pier, Chicago, Illinois to be assigned to the *USS Okala*. I didn't see our ship anywhere but this is a big place. No sooner did we get here and they grant us leave starting tomorrow at 1300 hour running until June first at 0645 hour. At least they gave us a place to store our gear (and my journal) before I leave for home.

After I am sure this is really going to happen and I am on my way home starting tomorrow morning, I will send a telegram to Norma.

If I can get a train out tomorrow night, I will be in Cincinnati by Thursday morning. I keep thinking this would be the time to ask her what has been on my mind for months. I am nearing the end of my four years; war appears to be ending soon, as we appear to be defeating the Japs, and everything points to my being out of the Navy before long.

6/01/1945: I am finally back in Chicago getting in last night. I found the same sailor I rode to Cincinnati with, going back to Chicago at the train terminal. It was nice to have someone to talk with on the way. After getting back, I learned I was part of the gunner group going back to Great Lakes Training Center, where I did boot camp, to the anti-aircraft training school. I was told it may be a couple of weeks. Again, I am a GM3! They still think I don't know how to aim and fire a gun.

One thing for sure is I have not seen the ship anywhere around and they don't know when the commissioning date will be. I need to update my love on this change with my newer new address.

6/03/1945: Great Lakes looks exactly as I left it in December 1941. Their plan is for gunners to practice firing seven days and five nights for the two weeks at this location. It will be hard to write when I am getting back to the barracks at 2200 hour. On the weekend it will be about 1600 -1700 hour. At least we won't be assigned other duties like watches or scrubbing floors. I better do a letter now while I have the time.

I did propose to her on my last day there. We talked the entire time we were together about; if we were to marry what it would be like. I would have to be out of the Navy because she didn't want to have our children born in ports around the world. Nice to hear she wanted children. I also would need to give up any alcohol drinking.

I did try to hard press the marriage question on my last night and I need to apologize for doing so. But she did say the magic words that made me the happiest man in the world. I hope to make her proud of her decision.

6/04/1945: I have been firing guns all morning and afternoon on the range. They give us from 1600 to 2000 hour to do our own stuff. Then our night firing starts at 2030 hour until 2200 hour. So, I need to write my love before I go back out on night firing. I remember having thoughts of sitting by a fire with snow outside and being cozy with my sweetheart. The fire's light is shining in her hair. I can't wait until we are together always.

6/06/1945: The first anniversary of D-Day has arrived and a lot has happened in a year. The Nazis have surrendered and I hope Japan won't be far behind. I still remember well the months of shuttling supplies from Southampton to Omaha and Utah Beaches. But today it is a nice warm day with rain expected overnight. I do like sleeping with the rain coming down.

We did our morning firing and watched gun operation films in the afternoon instead of firing. We even had time to do the screen-on-the-wall airplanes to shoot down. Being a weekday, we had evening work but it was more gun training films. We did see a 'Screen Magazine' film for the armed forces. See Editor's Movie Info at the end of this document.

After being let off the firing range early, Cliff and I walked about the center and pointed out things from our time being 'boots' here. We found the hamburger stand where it always was and went through the line. We each ate four burgers, then got in line again. We got a couple of burgers to take for some of our buddies in the barracks. Getting off the range early allows me to start a letter to my sweetheart 'forever'! I may even write to my sister. Just a week to go being here in Chicago. Unless things change again.

6/07/1945: It is raining but I got a letter from Norma, so I am happy. We still did some practice firing at a target towed about 1500 feet behind a plane on a cable. I guess 1500 is far enough we won't actually hit the plane itself. The plane is radio controlled so if we did hit it, nobody would be killed except for the gunner who shot it down. I did not like the waiting around for my turn to shoot. The rain kept us in during the afternoon watching the same gun films as before.

6/08/1945: The latest scuttlebutt is June 15th will be our departure date for the ship. Norma said if she traveled up to see me, I would be leaving here for the ship at the same time. She is usually right.

Tonight, is to be our last night of firing practice. A striker and I worked on cleaning parts of a gun and reassembling it. I enjoyed it very much. I also enjoyed the letter I got from Norma today. She must be rushing around too much or occupied with her upcoming vacation plans. She dated her letter June 13th. Or maybe our marriage plans were on her mind!

6/09/1945: Typical firing day on the range. Tonight, is Saturday night! Cliff, Leonard, Ed and I were heading to the movies and asked Clarence Hammonds if he wanted to go with us. Bud, his preferred name, is one of the many electrical guys on our ship. The five of us tried to see "**Where do we go from here**" but the empty seats were reserved for 'ship's company' (meaning the crew of a ship in dock). We lied and said 'yes' when questioned about being 'ship's company', so the 'Boot' let us into the movie. See Editor's Movie Info at the end of this document.



Clarence A, 'Bud' Hammond,
EM2 Electrician's Mate,
Petty Officer, 2nd class

After the movie, I took everyone over to a bowling alley I knew from boot camp days. Again, we were asked about being ship's company, said yes and he let us in to play. We played one game and left before our luck runs out and we get kicked out. We all had a wonderful, fun time.

6/10/1945: I can't stop thinking of my beautiful Norma. The sun is out and the day is lovely but not the kind of sunshine as it would be, if she was here. Even when I look at the stars during the night, they would not be as bright as when she is in my arms with light shining in her eyes. I have gotten too crazy about her and I know it. I just look for the day I am out of the service and we are together forever.

We did play a softball game after being on the firing range today. It was a great game in a nicely cool evening. We had not played in a long time but still managed to win, 10 to 9. We are told there will be no more night firing practice but who knows if that is true. If we are off, maybe we can get another game with some team. Still can't get Norma out of my thoughts with a log fire and a cozy room. I better start a letter to her.

6/11/1945: Plans are always changing. I had to write my darling earlier because they had us back firing at night again. I am writing here just before 2200 hour. Earlier today, the visibility was so poor we could not fire until this afternoon. Instead, we were in the gun shed for two hours and a class on plane recognition. We are supposed to fire at night on Thursday the 14th. Saturday will be 0300-hour rising, getting gear ready and a ten-hour trip to the ship in Jeffersonville, Indiana. Not in Chicago at all.

6/12/1945: I ran out of the stationary I got from Clem, so I tried around to see if anyone had any extra, I could use. A guy named Lloyd had some to share. He was one of the radio room men.

No wonder he had extra stationary. Everyone would give him stuff like stationary in exchange for information about the ship's destination and scuttlebutt. The paper's heading had an anchor with USN on it and the words "United States Navy" below it. Very nice.

Lloyd G. Peters, Jr



Since we didn't have night firing practice, the commander assigns us to various tasks. I was assigned the 2200-to-2400-hour fire watch in the barracks. I am sitting in the hallway for light; the lights are out in the barracks and I wanted to write in this journal. The empty Coca-Cola case sitting next to me made a nice wooden table for writing a letter to my love, Norma. She is planning to take a vacation soon so I hope she has good weather.

Before I write letters, I note in my journal the day I had to help in writing to my love.

We unloaded ammunition off trucks into a warehouse and loaded the truck back with empty casings. Because the visibility was so bad, we did no firing practice at all. Also, they had us police the grounds around our barracks. Makes you feel like you earned your chow after this kind of work. I did have time to go to a movie with my buddies after supper. We saw "**A Medal for Benny**". See Editor's Movie Info at the end of this document.

And the reason I didn't see the ship around the Navy Pier is because our ship is still in Jeffersonville, Indiana. It never was in Chicago. The latest information is; we are to leave Saturday, the 16th for Indiana. Then begin to take our ship down the Ohio, Mississippi and into New Orleans. I need to write 'Beautiful' that I might not get to write her during the trip down river.

6/13/1945: Another day of cloudiness and misty weather. We did get some shots off in the afternoon before the mist rolled in to shore. I got two letters from my 'Love' and one even had a notation on the back bringing up some very lovely memories. She said her vacation is progressing well. I wish I could be there with her. Need to give her my new address on the *USS Okala*.

After supper, a group of us went to the base auditorium to see a movie called "**Nob Hill**". Again, it was for 'ship's company' people. The shore patrol waves on duty in the lobby asked for ship's badges. Of course, not having any, we were turned away. We walked around the building and came back into the lobby. No one was on duty, so we all ran up the stairs to the balcony. When the lights came on after the show, we found ourselves among ship's officers and their families. We made a quick exit. We may not get liberty but we know how to have some fun anyway. See Editor's Movie Info at the end of this document.

6/14/1945: Tonight, was to be our LAST night of firing. They have given us tomorrow for getting our gear together and an early start on our sleep. The 0300 hour will come very fast. We will need to dress, eat and get stuff on the transport to Chicago by 0600 hour. At 0800 hour, our bus to Jeffersonville will be leaving.

Will need to remind Norma to include the '-2' after the ARS(T) because there are more than one. At least three ships from what I was told. This will help me to get the mail on time. Thinking of mail, I need to thank her for the pictures in her letter I got today.



Picture Norma sent to Ray 6/14/1945.

On the back it says:
"Hi Sailor" Norma Hewitt,
June -1945

6/15/1945: Tonight, looks like rain. But they did change our departure to June 19th. Seems like they don't know what to do with us half the time. Its good not to be going to the firing range again. The bad weather kept us inside again. I worked on the 20 MM ammunition and load magazines. Then we had a hands-on class with the Mark 3 trainer. I have not heard if we will get liberty over the weekend. I would rather be going to the ship or going to Norma.

6/17/1945: The weather was nicer with very little rain. I hope my sweetheart is having better weather as well on her vacation. We are to leave in the morning for the ship. I will be very disgusted if they change the date again.

I think this date will happen because the scuttlebutt is cooks and stewards for our ship are leaving tomorrow. Ed, my card playing buddy and cook, confirmed he was told to be ready for departing tomorrow. I am a little in the dumps knowing my future wife will be so close to my ship's location and I will not be able to see her. I look at her pictures now five times a day instead of the old three times.

6/18/1945: They had us up at 0300 hour this morning so we could pack our seabag and be ready by 0400 hour. The ride to Jeffersonville should not take long and everyone is excited to finally be reaching our ship. We are all very happy. Need to keep my darling aware of the change and hope she remembers the address change I sent her earlier. I hope she is enjoying her last vacation without me.

6/21/1945: We have spent the past few days getting squared away on the ship. I stowed my gear and was assigned a rack. Lieutenant Louis Silver is the commander of the **USS Okala, ARS(T)-2** but there are several more officers on the vessel. As part of the crew during the upcoming commissioning, we will be known as 'Plank Owners'. This is an old term coming from the crew who laid the planks to build the ship or the first aboard when commissioned.

The only guns on board are two quad 40mm AA gun mounts (stern and aft) and twelve single 20mm AA gun mounts alongside the starboard and port deck railings. There are no four inch or five-inch guns like I had on the Liberty ships.

6/24/1945: Today we took a short trip up river to let the ship stretch her legs around 1120 hour. We were not out long, getting back to the docks about 1200 hour. We were told we will need to take down the mast so we will be able to pass under the many bridges going across the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Finally, at 1440 hour, we were heading away from Jeffersonville for the last time. I am told it will take about 6 days to get to New Orleans.

I got the watch duty on the stern until 1600 hour and I loved every minute of it. It was hot today, so the breeze felt cool and the scenery was fantastic. The water was muddy but the weather cooled with the ship moving downstream. I had to wear earphones on this ship during watch duty and listen for any calls to my station's position.

USS Okala (ARST-2) Beginning her ferry voyage down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers from Jeffersonville, Indiana to New Orleans. She departed her builder's yard at Jeffersonville, 24 June 1945, passed Memphis, TN., 26 June, and arrived at New Orleans, 28 June. Note the larger crane stowed amidships. The mast is next to be lowered.



Below shows the 40mm quad AA gun mounting on the stern and the arrangement of boats aft. Note the mast still needs to be lowered. US National Archive photos # 19-N-89698 (above) & 19-N-86587A (below). US Navy Bureau of Ships photos now in the collections of the US National Archives.



Seeing great scenery has made me think of my beautiful girl waiting for me to return to her. I need to write her. I will need to apologize for not writing for several days. I am hoping a stop in New Orleans will mean mail for me. Also, I hope she will give me time on giving up the beer drinking. It's difficult for guy whose family name means barrel-maker. Our family came from Germany where beer is considered water. I remember my Dad brewing it at home and setting on a high shelf in the kitchen. When the cork gave way from the beer gassing, it was ready to drink.

Maybe it will help if I close my letter to her saying she is the "girl of my heart".

6/25/1945: It is just like old times. Today we were again cleaning the guns because they were full of grease and lubricant when packed in boxes from the manufacturer. The ship builder just mounted them in the various locations around the ship. I am confident we will have them cleaned and ready to fire before the shake down run out of New Orleans in the Gulf. The weather continues to get hotter and being above deck is the best place to write in this journal. I will also write letters to Marie and 'My Darling Norma'. She needs to know I trust her and I don't want her sitting around waiting for my return. But I do want her to wait for me. Just be honest about what's happening. It may hurt my feelings but I would rather know than be surprised at a later time. I miss her terribly.

I better start on those letters since I have to rise early and be on watch duty by 0400 hour. We are moving quite well down the river and should hit New Orleans in a day or two. Maybe mail call!

6/26/1945: Today was a lovely day. It was warmer. We were busy on checking out the guns and making sure they were cleaned very well. About 1600 hour, we made the turn from the Ohio River into the Mississippi River. It was wider but the scenery was much the same. Beautiful.

I have a great ship; good crew, O.K. officers and the meals are good with all-you-can-eat amounts. All this may change when we hit the ocean and away from the states. I hope Norma had a good vacation with great weather.



USS Okala (ARST-2) near Memphis, TN, 26 June 1945, during her delivery voyage down the Mississippi River system. Note that her mast has been folded down to clear bridges during this river trip. The ship is painted in Measure 31 camouflage scheme. Photo # NH 76090

6/27/1945: Things have certainly warmed up as we travel down the Mississippi. It is so uncomfortable to sleep below deck. We expect to be in New Orleans tomorrow and not staying for long, according to the scuttlebutt. I hope my sweetheart will continue to be happy about us even with me away at sea. I miss her very much.

6/28/1945: The **USS Okala** arrived in New Orleans at 0800 hour this morning. I learned I have officially been transferred to the **USS Okala**. Lt. Silvers issued orders for full uniforms to be worn all day. Sunbathing may be allowed on other days between 1200 and 1300 hour only. It will take me awhile to get the tan I want to show off to Norma. Hopefully, he will relax those orders once we are out to sea.

The official commissioning ceremony occurred at 1500 hour and it was very hot on deck. It lasted about 30 minutes.

There was no Chaplin to pray over the ship, her crew or the families of the crew. I pray this is not an omen of the voyages to come. We are now considered 'plank owners' non-officially. Next task is the ship shakedown to be conducted in the Galveston Texas area I am told. Scuttlebutt never stops even if there is no real source for the information. Lloyd, my radio man, says the rumor is correct.

6/28/1945: Arrival in New Orleans, Commissioning date. Partial list of Plank Owners I know:

Silver, Louis – Lt (1st CDR, USS Okala)
 Miller, Michael O. – ENS (2nd CDR, USS Okala)
 Baxter, Joseph – Lt
 Boettcher, Raymond – GM3c
 Byrne, Edward S. – BKR3
 Doe, Walter P. – CM2
 Ford, James E – COX
 Grant, Charles S. – F1
 Hammond, C. A. – EM2
 Hayes, John T, – Chief GM
 Kowalski, Thaddeus – PHAR
 Makin, Irvin E. – SC3
 Milbut, Stanley J, – BM2
 Milhouse, Clyde B. – QM3
 Neal, Grover R. – PNC
 Peters, Jr., Lloyd G. – RM2
 Root, William "Bill" – RT
 Schultz, Paul Clifford – S1
 Smith, Roy Campbell – CDR
 Sweringen, James C. – HMC
 Taylor, Percy "Perry" L. – FPG1, 1st class, DS
 Verville, Clement A. – SK1
 Wald, Charles B. – ET
 Wallace, Robert L – GMSN
 Wallace, William C. – S1
 Waters, Fred E. – FPG, DS, Chaplin
 Weedle, Obie – GM1
 Wegerzyn, Benjamin J. – CQM
 Whitaker, Robert – MAM2

6/30/1945: What a mail call of letters I got today. Several from my girl and a couple from Marie. One of Norma's letters says her brother Cassius had passed away just four days ago. From the few times I met him, he seemed like a nice guy. I will try to write her something but sympathy is not my best way of writing.

7/01/1945: It's Sunday and so very hot here. We worked on re-assembling and cleaning all the guns. This was so the shore repair / maintenance men can match up the sight and align with the gun's director. We only got one gun done and stopped on the second gun because of the heat. Then it rained in the afternoon. Made me think of my walks with Norma in the rain. The rain did seem to cool things down.

The plan is to stay in New Orleans until the 17th, then go over to Galveston, Texas for a shakedown run. It should go well as we have the best crew Uncle Sam has anywhere. The equipment for showing a movie onboard has arrived except for the screen. Milbut, the boatswain, put some old hammocks and canvas together to substitute for the screen. I need to finish up in this journal and get some letters wrote so I can make the show. The movie is "**Brother Rat**". I have seen this one but I will enjoy seeing it again.

Instead of ending my letters to Norma with 'Good-night Beautiful', I am going to start my letters with 'Hello Beautiful' in the first page heading. It will be the first thing she reads. Maybe I will seal Norma's letter with a number fifty-one as a new ending. I do miss here very much. *See Editor's Movie Info at the end of this document.*

7/2/1945: Another miserably hot day and then it rained in the afternoon. The rain from yesterday had gotten into the storage room making the gun magazines wet. So, most of our day was swabbing them out and lubricating them the magazines again. There are only seven of us in the gunnery group including the Chief. Our officer for the group is Lt. Joseph Baxter. There are fourteen guns on the ship for us to maintain.

We still are waiting to get into dry dock but the laundry service is coming out to the ship as we wait. I shower every day with this heat and am thankful I have extra clothes.

One happy note is I got paid today. I think the last payday was back in Newport about mid-May. I have chosen the salvage office to do my journal and letter writing tonight. It is above deck unlike the mess hall and therefore much cooler. There are nice big tables to write on which are used for spreading out blueprints. Then they would make a detailed plan on how to salvage or repair a vessel.

This ship also has speakers everywhere playing music just like the LST training ship I was aboard. Makes sense since this ship is a converted LST. They play music only during 1130 to 1300 hour and 1730 to 2100 hour. As I sit here to write, they are playing a "Spike Jones" number. Since the ship is new, it seems to have all the latest equipment.

Only thing missing is my "Short and Sweet" who is far away right now. I do miss her very much and pray it will be a short trip out to sea. Thinking of her made me remember to have her add 'Division G' to my address for gunnery group.

7/08/1945: I am on my 2200-to-0200-hour security watch and we are in dry dock. I brought my journal and some writing paper so I could get some of these things done. I am behind in both. Norma's latest letter was very sweet and made me happy. It's because she said she will wait for my return. The letter was dated June 25th, postmarked Michigan City but didn't reach me until July 5th.

She described a dream about her future husband (this would be me I hope) as a magician who can make wonderful things appear and has a goatee. I guess I will need to grow one. I do like the 'Magician's' ideal of a family being at least a boy and girl. I do come from a family of many more than two kids. I might have to negotiate on this. And to keep her from worrying about me down here, I will assure her I am behaving myself. She does like to worry.

7/09/1945: What a miserable day again. Hot and rainy which is putting us behind on getting these gun sights aligned for the shake-down trip. The rain seems to come in about mid-afternoon for about an hour. At least, it is over by our movie time around 2030 hour. Our ammunition has still not arrived to be loaded.

While we wait around to eat or for a movie, everyone talks about their hometowns. I learned Perry was actually born in Nova Scotia, Canada, but raised in Massachusetts. We teased him about sneaking into the country and was not an official citizen. We changed our tune when we learned he was aboard the **USS San Francisco** at Pearl Harbor on December 7th. Nice guy.

There are a lot of younger guys in the group, seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds. Makes me feel like an old salt in a way. Clem, my paper supplier, spoke up about maybe being the oldest one onboard ship. He was from Massachusetts, like Perry, and born in 1908. Surely, he must be the oldest. Whitaker said he was older being born in 1902. Sounds like we need to have a contest of who is the oldest aboard.

I am so glad I have those pictures of Norma on my locker to help me dream about her every night. Especially, the beach one with wind in her hair. I think I have time for a short letter to my 'short and sweet' before the movie.

7/10/1945: I thought yesterday was miserable but today topped it. As I was helping to move a large box past the gun tub, I caught my finger on a piece of metal sticking out. It is not bad but the scratch had to be bandaged to stop the bleeding. Also, it is tender and is affecting my great ability to write readable words. I got two letters today from Norma so she must be feeling better and wanting to write. Still hot here but we finished cleaning all our guns and ready for the shake-down run. The extra parts and ordnance gear are all stowed away per regulations. It still rains in the afternoon but appeared to be heavier today.

The movie tonight is the same as yesterday, so having no watch duties, I will finish my journal and letters to Marie and Norma early. I hope my handwriting will be readable. Then I am off to get plenty of sleep.

7/11/1945: It is still hot but not as bad as yesterday. We gunners laid some matting in our ammunition storage rooms where we keep our supply of magazines for the guns. We had some extra gun sights and stored them in the rooms as well. In the afternoon, we worked in the armory making a place for storing motors on the wall. The armory is where the ships small arms like pistols, sub-machine guns and rifles are kept.

As usual, I was drilling some holes in the wall when the drill slipped and hit the finger I had scratched yesterday. This did make it bleed more so I went back to first aid and got it bandaged again. Sweringen was swearing again at my lack of concern for my finger. He showed me how to bandage it myself. Seems I have to bandage it three or four times a day to keep it clean and dry. I am amazed how much this little finger gets in the way and wants to bump into everything.

Before the movie tonight, I was down in first aid and helped Kowalski make 'swabs' by rolling cotton on the end of small wooden sticks. While making swabs, I was learning about medical care and how to treat wounds. Very interesting stuff.

I am told the movies are going to be a couple of short subject ones, so I will finish up this journal entry and write my letter to Norma after the show. I will need to remember to let her know I am not a fan of the opera but hope she enjoyed herself at the one she was going to attend.

7/12/1945: What a long day it has been. I need to gather my thoughts here so I can write a letter to Norma before getting to bed. I will need to get up at 0330 hour for an 0400 watch. I shouldn't have stayed and watch the movie "**God is My Co-Pilot**" but I really enjoyed it. *See Editor's Movie Info at the end of this document.*

I was in the Armory most of the day getting it in ship-shape. Lt. Baxter gave me an earful about our grease and oil being stored in someone else's compartment and to move it. We did immediately. After storing our gunnery books away as well, I knocked off early to get ready for my 1600 watch today. I showered, shaved and went to have my finger wrapped because I ran out of bandages. It is healing well and did not bleed all day.

I need to stop and write Norma. I need to make it short but still wish her 'sweet dreams, beautiful.'

7/13/1945: I am tired because I stood the 0400-to-0800-hour watch. After my watch I had been feeling ill most of the day. After chow, the ordnance group uncovered all the guns. We checked them for rust on mounts, wiped down the gun and looked for anything out of regulation. A striker, an apprentice working to prepare for his exam to upgrade his rating, helped me clean about half the gun barrels found to be unacceptable. I was glad for his help.

In the afternoon, we put our empty boxes, the sights came aboard in, on the deck to be taken ashore. Also, the laundry service started back now that we are out of dry dock. It was here to get the laundry when we put the boxes on the deck. I will send my clothes as long as they are willing to come and get them.

I am again back in the salvage office to write in this journal. I am here because I intend on using the typewriter on the desk for a letter to 'sweets'. This way she will be able to read it since my finger is still very sore and tender. I did get a new letter from her today as well. My hope is to finish both of these by show-time so I can go to bed right after the movie.

Maybe I feel bad because it is very, very hot today. The movie tonight is "**The Story of Dr. Wassell**" and is supposed to be good. *See Editor's Movie Info at the end of this document.*

7/15/1945: Today is Sunday and the ship's Captain, Lt. Silver, made it official. Fred would be the 'Sky Pilot' of our ship. This is a non-regulation name we use for a chaplain. Our crew is too small for the Navy to put one aboard. So, the Captain made one for us and there's not a better guy on this ship. He is older and married but he is always reading and studying the Bible. I even went with him to a church in New Orleans when we were in dry dock. Fred was always getting a group up when we can get to a church. There even was a newspaper guy here today. He said he will write up an article on Mr. Waters. Fred wants to go into town to get some instruments and have music during services aboard ship. He really is the best guy the captain could have picked.

7/17/1945: Here it is Tuesday and I can't get the weekend out of my mind. I had liberty. While Cliff and I were ashore waiting for the ferry to take us over to the city, we saw a nice place nearby. Since it would be a half hour or so before the ferry got there, we went in and sat down. Cliff started talking to some girls and I joined the conversation. We made friends and danced with several of them. They looked like decent girls and this was all that happened. Cliff and I left by ourselves and still able to catch the ferry into town. The question I am asking myself is do I tell my future wife about this event or not. Let's change the subject.

We cleaned our ready service lockers. We prepared the magazine storage rooms for more ammunition we will soon be getting. By Sunday the 22nd, we are leaving New Orleans for Galveston and the shake-down run. Norma's last letter had a picture of her sitting by a fountain. I will send her some pictures of my buddies and me. I think I need to tell her about the girls I met. It is the only way to clear my mind and I want her to know I will always be honest with her. No secrets. I better hurry and write the letter so I can get to the movie on deck.

I am told it will be "**Tonight and Every Night**", then a short film on the invasion of Iwo Jima. *See Editor's Movie Info at the end of this document.*

7/18/1945: Perry had let me get into the salvage office again. I very much appreciated it. I just finished typing a letter to Norma. I was replying to the two letters I got from her today. She says she loves me as much as ever. I hope she still will love me after reading the letter I sent yesterday about the girls I met. As for today's events, it rained and rained.

We were trying to clean out one of the magazine rooms but had to stop about half-way finishing, due to the rain. I had an hour before dinner, so I smoked a cigar and relaxed listening to the rain. Afternoon was more rain, so I washed clothes instead of sending it to the laundry service. We should be in Galveston on Sunday as planned.

I heard by the scuttlebutt; we are behind schedule for being in the Pacific working salvage jobs. I hope when we reach the Pacific, we go by Hawaii as I want to get Norma something there. Something Hawaiian would be perfect. I have some time to eat and get ready for tonight's movie since I washed my duds. I wonder what I will see tonight.

7/19/1945: Today went fast because I was busy doing things. In the morning with it raining, I was down in the armory cleaning up pistols and loading the clips of 45 caliber ammo. This will allow them to quickly issue the arms out to the officers when required. I do wonder if some of the officers I have met, are capable of handling a gun. Maybe the ones who are the most irritating will hurt themselves and give us some peace around here. I guess I shouldn't have written that comment in my journal.

In the afternoon I spent my time helping Clyde Milhouse, our Quartermaster. We loaded onboard all kinds of food stores. I saw apples, oranges, cheese, meat and even fish. It took four hours to do. It was 1630 hour and I was too tired to go ashore.

Instead, I went back down to the armory, where Perry and others were welding pad eyes on the wall. This will help us secure gear during rough seas, I was told. I still need to write a response to Norma's letter that I had gotten today. Hers was lovely as always.

7/21/1945: A long and busy day. Being up early for a 0400 to 0800 watch is how it started. And the rain was happening during my entire watch. I should have not stayed up until 2300-hour last night.

My three cups of coffee on my watch helped a little but the rain made me sleepy. Then after morning chow, I worked to get the magazine rooms ready for the expected ammunition. We began loading aboard the ammo about 1330 hour and only stopped an hour for supper. By 1830 hour we were back loading ammo until 2030 hour.

Then, I was told to help load onboard several canvas rolls. I also sent back ashore several empty gas cans. I was done by 2200 hour but it took time to unwind.

I feel as if someone beat me on my arms and back. At least it is done and I hope for a long time. I got another wonderful letter from Norma and Marie. Both cheered me up and I need to write something to my sister and my 'future wife' before I sink into dream land. I am so tired!

7/22/1945: We left out of New Orleans and headed for Galveston. The plan is to have an inspection by the Galveston Base Commander and a final shake-down. We should be there by Monday morning. At least, this is the scuttlebutt going around.

The captain did get several copies of the newspaper with the article on our 'Chaplain Waters'. He passed them out to the crew.

I got a copy because I wanted to send it home for everyone to see what is happening on my ship. Fred is old but not old enough to win the 'oldest onboard ship' title.

7/23/1945: Today was good and bad. Good because we arrived in Galveston and mail came with a letter from my future wife. Bad because the Base Captain came aboard this afternoon for his inspection. Even worse, he talked down to us like a bunch of training camp 'boots.' He said the same words we heard in boot camp from the instructors; "We will TELL you HOW to do it but YOU will do the WORK".



Article on Fred Waters, July 21, 1945



Sent above picture to Norma, USS Okala Ball team, taken in Newport, Rhode Island about Mid-April - early May 1945. Ray is second from the left in front row, kneeling,

7/29/1945: Today was firing day and tonight I am beat. Due to the shortage of trained gunners, I oversaw four different gun mounts. Just when I got one in proper firing order, another one would stop. I looked like a chicken with his head cut off, running from one gun to another. When they called for a firing pause, I still had to work on some guns. It wasn't until after dinner in the afternoon that I was able to get the guns running nicely. By 1730 hour, I had cleaned all the barrels and stowed away gear in the magazine rooms. Washing up for chow was an effort for my tired body.

My hope is the shake-down testing is complete and we can get out of here. They stopped the mail during the testing, so I expect some letters tomorrow. But I need to get some letters written tonight so they will get out before we sail out of here for the Pacific.

7/31/1945: We got back into dock at the Galveston base. I continued to check the cleaning of all the gun barrels and mounts. The morning rain slowed me down but after dinner, I got two guns done. All that is left is two more guns and a mount. If I get my stuff done, I may be able to help out the other guys with their guns.

It is very hot still and I am going around mostly without a shirt. But it is not too hot to pass around the baseball on shore nearby the ship. It would have been nice if we found someone to play a ballgame. Then we could have had some real fun.

I had a postcard showing Galveston under a full moon. I mailed it to my future wife very late last night. Saying 'future wife' makes me feel wonderful! Knowing she wants to be my wife makes it beyond wonderful, like on "Top of the World". I put the stamp on the postcard upside down. I hope she remembers what it means when I do it.

She teases me about some South Pacific Kid she likes but I know it's me. Well, since I am sitting in the salvage office again and there is a typewriter handy, I need to get a letter done before we put out to sea.

8/2/1945: Today we loaded ammunition to replace what we used in the Sunday firing shake-down test. We were done at 1800 hour and washed up for chow. After chow a striker and I secured empty cans in the magazine rooms before going to sea. I'm tired and can't write anymore in this journal. Letter writing will just have to wait for another day.

8/4/1945: Yesterday, we left Galveston finally but we didn't go towards the Pacific. Instead, we headed east towards Gulfport, Mississippi. We are not going fast. I am told we will be there tomorrow, Sunday morning. This short run is very nice with a cool breeze.

Since the war in Europe is over, the east coast and the Gulf are clear of subs so we can travel with lights on in safety. The scuttlebutt is we won't be there in Gulfport long and then we are to head south to the Canal Zone.



GALVESTON BEACH is famous for its safety, entirely devoid of dangerous undertows, the warm waters and hard, clear sand.

Dear Norma
I just arrived in town, so I thought of you and decided to send you a few lines. I hope everything is alright. The town isn't much, but they say the beach is wonderful. I wish you were here with me to enjoy the moonlight.
all my love
Raymond

GALVESTON, TEXAS
JUL 31 230 AM
POST CARD
MISS Norma Hewitt
Madisonville R.R. #10
Cincinnati, Ohio

GENUINE CURTIS-CHICAGO "C.T. ART-COLORONE" POSTCARD

8/5/1945: Gulfport was reached this morning. The scuttlebutt now says we leave for the Canal Zone on Tuesday and should take us five or six days to reach it. Sounds slow to me. I remember when I went through the canal on the *SS Meriwether Lewis* and the *SS Mobilgas*. It was wonderful. From the canal, the plan is to go to Pearl Harbor.

I hope Norma remembers the codes we set up on my last visit home when I proposed. They will tell her where I am but not cause the censors to cut it out of my letters. We are permitted to go ashore today and I will try to get another postcard showing Gulfport to send to my darling. I will do the upside-down stamp again and hope she remembers what it means. I guess this is a clue for me to stop in this journal and get a letter to her written. Maybe even time to write Marie and the family.

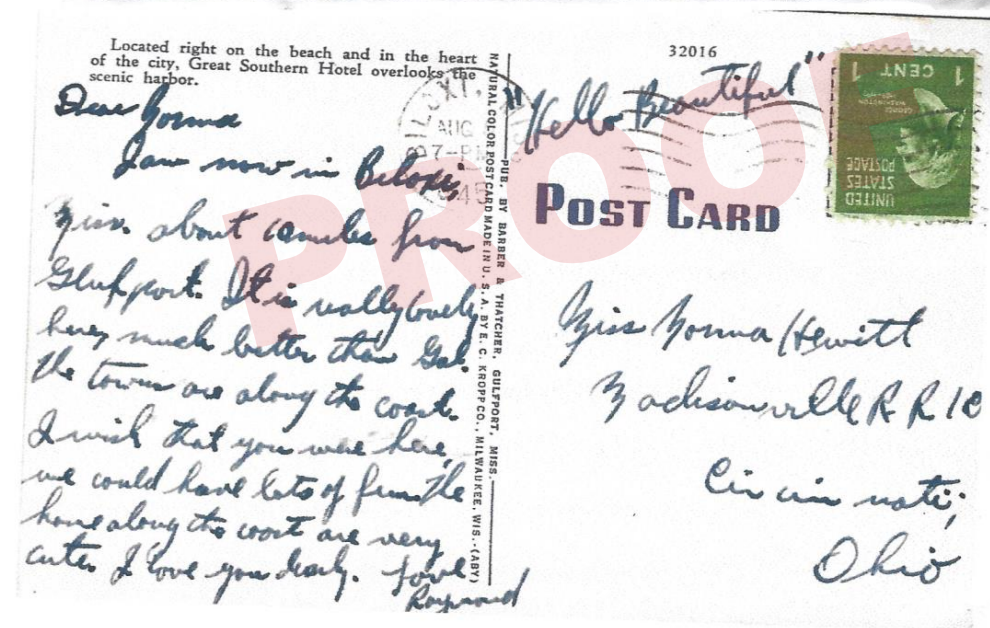
8/7/1945: It is getting late and we are to leave out tonight for the Canal Zone. I can't think of anything to write and I need to have something to put in Norma's letter. This maybe the last chance I have to send off a letter before we sail. I did get a couple of letters from her today and she wrote about how nice her vacation was going.

I never realized it but she and I have not gone swimming together on any of my visit's home. All I can think about is my future wife and what a happy time it will be. Now what things I can I write to make her smile.

This trip will likely be the longest we have been apart. Definitely the farthest we have been apart. Better write to make the mail pick-up about to go off the ship. I am starting to get a lump in my throat and wet eyes.

8/12/1945: It's Sunday and the ships are waiting their turn to enter the Canal Zone. This morning after services, I was in the armory cleaning the small arms. The officers did some firing practice with them last week.

We, in the ordnance group, began cleaning guns including their splinter shields and painting the mounts like we were doing last week. We will be doing the same next week. They call this spring cleaning but it is really to keep us busy and out of trouble.



This afternoon was ordered by the commander, to be a "Holiday Routine" time. So, I decided to spend my free time sleeping and sunbathing to work on my tan. Lt. Silver, the skipper, has been very good about letting us go without our shirts since we left the states. I will even spend time writing some letters. Maybe I can get them sent when we are going through the Canal Zone.

8/15/1945: What a day it was on the ship. It rained but everyone was excited to hear about the Japanese surrender from the President last night about 1930 hour. Peters, our radio man, hooked the broadcast into the ship-wide speakers we have on the *USS Okala*. The scuttlebutt was about a bomb we had, destroyed a whole city. One bomb. I think the war's now over. That bomb probably saved mine and others' lives. I am now ready to go home come October.

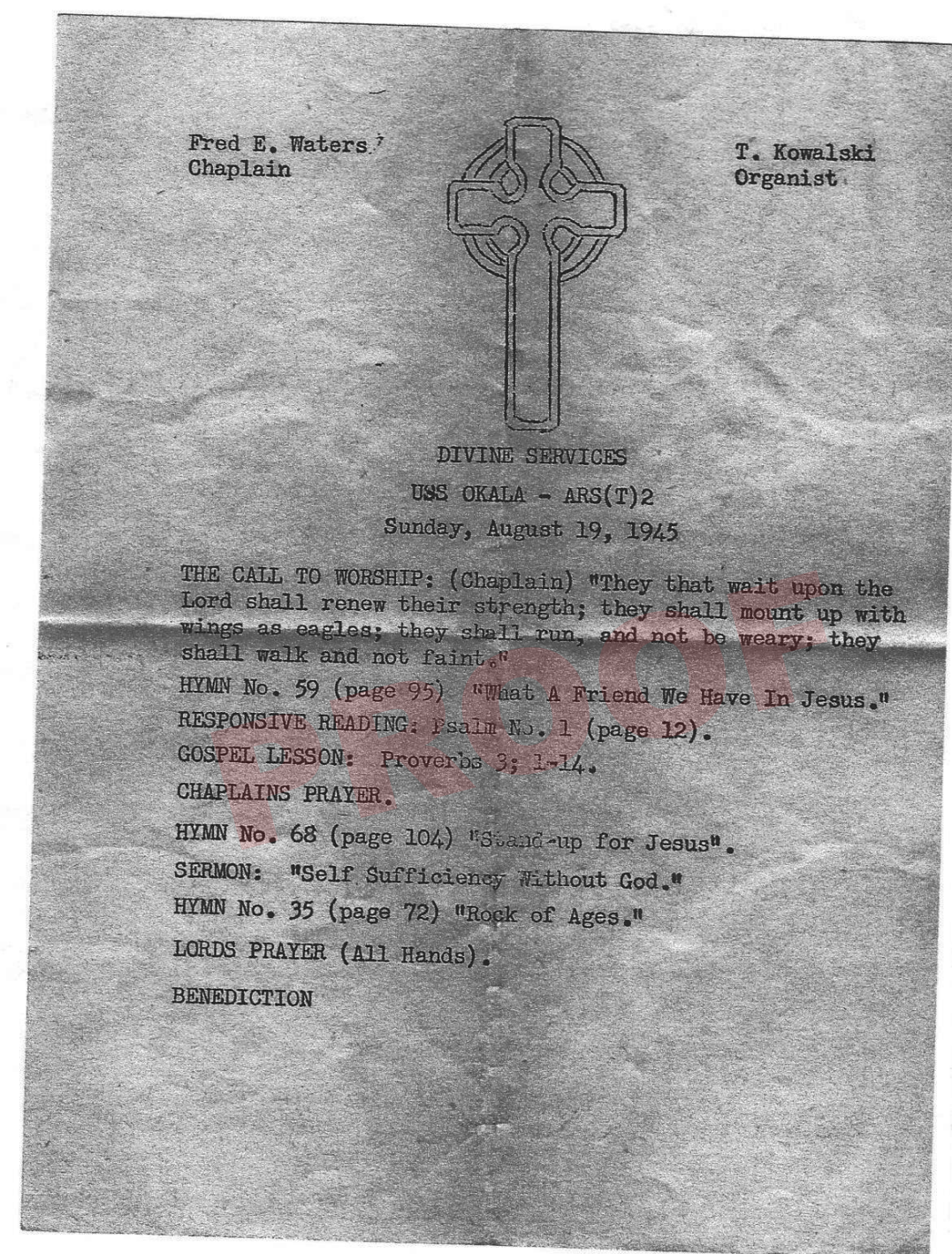
This means my trip in the Pacific may not be as long as I thought. I might be home with my future wife even sooner than planned. I wonder what her thoughts were upon hearing about the surrender. Lt Baxter told me; I have thirty-five points toward my discharge from my four-year commitment. Everybody is talking about how it will feel to wear civilian clothes again. And being able to go about as you want, not as you are told. Unless you are married; someone yelled. It was a funny and a happy get-together.

8/16/1945: We have finished passing through the canal locks and now on the Pacific side. We have loaded fuel, fresh water and supplies to begin heading out to sea. It may be a long time before I can send a letter so I need to get one off today before we pull away from the docks. Then off to Pearl Harbor, if the scuttlebutt is still accurate.

Wherever we are going, it should be tedious and boring since there will be no subs or kamikazes to encounter. Sometimes, I wonder if the surrender news was for real and not an enemy trick. I did get a letter from Norma yesterday and will miss my 'short and sweet' mail until I reach a port.

8/19/1945: The showers continue to fall. It keeps me from working on the gun cleaning and assembly.

I did take the opportunity to attend one of Chaplain Waters' services. It was very nice and he did a good sermon. A lot of the crew and officers were there. It was the first time I heard the organ played by Kowalski and he was good. The organ was a donation from some group in New Orleans. We had song books and we all repeated, as best I could, the Lord's Prayer. I intend to continue going to his services. If the weather stays good, we might get done with the painting of the mounts in the next week.



8/23/1945: It is late today and I am tired. We did finish the painting on the mounts and will begin reassembling the guns. I need to get a letter written down to Norma and Marie. It has been a week since leaving the Canal Zone and I want to have mail ready to send at the next port.

I will include the church service program in my letter. I wonder if my sweets kept the clipping I sent on the Chaplain.

9/01/1945: The trip is going very well and I am told we should hit Pearl Harbor in a few days. I have also heard the Skipper has approved having a 'smoker' tomorrow. There will be boxing matches and entertainment all performed by the crew. I don't know about boxing but I know several in the crew who would be good entertainers with jokes and music.

Also, Pappy Waters will be having regular church services and he intends to do them every Sunday. He does a fine job and most of the crew attends. Every week, the Chaplain seems to get better and better. What I miss is getting letters from Norma. What I wouldn't give for one of those fifty bus-stop kisses. I am thankful I have her pictures to help me through each day. But some days, I feel like a sailor in the rain without a raincoat. I am filled with sadness because I miss her so much.

9/02/1945: I slept until 0630 hour which is late for me. I went to church services. But I was thinking about when I was home, I went to church with my sweets. With the war ending, I hope I will be in church with her every Sunday. The censoring was lifted completely. I now can tell Norma where I am, without using codes. Every day is a day closer to my being with her forever.

It rained this evening but that did not stop the 'smoker'. During the four boxing matches, I was the timekeeper using the ship's bell for each round. I watched several crewmen participate in a pie-eating contest. They put their whole face into chocolate cream pies to see who the fastest eater was. The singing and music were great as well. After all that, we had a movie too. It was an old picture called "**The Mummy's Ghost**". See Editor's Movie Info at the end of this document.

9/05/1945: I am finally in Pearl Harbor, arriving yesterday. I was granted liberty to go ashore for today and see Honolulu. I saw a beautiful hotel called the Royal Hawaiian. The Navy runs it for submarine crews as a rest camp. I saw Waikiki Beach at the rear of the hotel with guys surf-boarding and canoeing on the water. The open pavilion had a Navy band playing dance music. This place would be lots of fun to bring 'Sweets' on a honeymoon. I wonder if she dances. If she does, I bet she dances wonderfully.

I have gained five pounds on this trip and the food wasn't that good. Ed does make good bread and rolls which makes the rest of the food taste better. If I get another liberty before we leave, I want to spend more of it on the beach. The Skipper said we will be leaving out Friday. Currently, the destination could be Okinawa or Tokyo. Either place will take almost 3 weeks getting there. I will again be crossing that magical day gaining - losing line. I better get a letter written to Marie and, of course, my future bride. I had gotten ten letters from Norma when we hit the dock.



Handkerchief bought in Honolulu along with the grass skirt.

I bought Norma a handkerchief and a grass skirt which I need to package for mailing. I am telling her the tradition is for the guy's girlfriend to send him a picture of her wearing the skirt.

They are playing Perry Como's hit song "**Till the End of Time**". I like the "My Love for You will Grow Deeper with Every Passing Day" part. I wonder if Norma has heard it, Maybe, she thinks of me when listening to it. I think of her when I hear it. I almost forgot; I need to write that I hope she has a great big Happy Birthday. *See Song Lyrics in Editor's Movie Info at the end of this document.*

9/7/1945: I wrote one last letter to Norma early this morning before breakfast to be sure of it making the mail call. Yesterday, I spent the day ashore but not on liberty. From 0800 hour until about 2000 hour, I was at a warehouse loading ship's service supplies and food on transports to our dock area. After returning to the ship for evening chow, I sat down in an out-of-way place to settle my food and hoping they wouldn't find me to load more stores. They didn't and I felt ashamed, but also glad, because I was very tired.

I hope I get a chance to write one more letter before we leave out but I am not counting on it. We had a change in command at the top. Lt. Louis Silver is going off the ship. Ensign Michael O. Miller was made the new Skipper. Some of the ship's crew were switched out as well while at Pearl Harbor.

09/08/1945: We loaded firefighting equipment today. It took a long time; they have a lot of gear. I couldn't go unnoticed last night like I did the night before, so I was loading supplies until 2300 hour. Wouldn't be so bad if we didn't have to get up at 0545 hour. The loading is now completed and I hear we are heading to Okinawa.

I will get one more letter to 'Sweets' sent before we pull away from the dock. I need her to know it will be a long time until I hit a port to send another letter. Even with the war over, there is a lot of salvaging to be done and this ship is really needed.

9/21/1945: The trip has been mostly uneventful. Peters told me the ship had picked up another radio guy when we were in Pearl Harbor. Lloyd said he was just off the **USS El Dorado**; Admiral Turner's ship which was dedicated to communications of all types. The guy's name was Gacek, Chester Gacek. The reason why Lloyd came to see the gun crew is because of new orders he handed to Lt. Baxter. We were told to 'sink any floating object posing a possible threat to navigation'.

So, we had some fun firing at an empty life raft and a buoy for fishing nets we saw on Sunday. But on Wednesday, we fired and destroyed a floating mine. Of course, all this firing meant we had guns to clean which kept us busy on the trip.

9/28/1945: We arrived in Buckner Bay, Okinawa at 1200 hour yesterday. This is sooner than I expected. I have learned to use ship's time and not worry what day it is in the states.

Lt. Baxter helped me with the new point system issued for discharge eligibility. Seems I now have forty-five and a one-quarter points. Not quite enough to be discharge but getting close. They keep dropping the points required for discharge which helps. Still from Okinawa, some of the guys who do have the points, can't seem to find transportation back home to get discharged. So, we all just do our Navy routine.

We are told we will be here for a few weeks repairing and getting small ships off the beaches. Then the scuttlebutt is to travel to China or Japan. But first, we began preparing for a 'Typhoon' or what we call back home a big storm. They said it should be Sunday when it hits us. The important part is for us all to spread out and avoid dragging anchor where we might blow into another ship. How much of this do I tell Norma? She worries too much about my being in the Navy as it is now.

I do need to write her and the family since I now can get mail again. Only problem I heard was our mail went first to Saipan which is near Guam. It is expected to be here tomorrow. I look forward to those letters from my lovely. Now my problem is I don't remember if I told her happy birthday in my last letters mailed in Hawaii. I will plead forgiveness and hope she had a wonderful twenty-fifth birthday. I hope she smiles at my writing something like that. Her smiles are always so lovely.

9/29/1945: Another day and still no mail. I have been reading my love's last letters over and over since Pearl, to where I know them by heart. All the preparation we did and the typhoon missed us by going to our west. That might be a good thing I'm told. The island does not appear very attractive from what I can see being out at anchor. They are not letting anyone go ashore at this time. The word from Lieutenant Baxter is three or four more weeks here then on to Japan or China.

When I write to Norma tonight, I will tell her the news is grim on me finding a way from here back to the states for discharge. Also, I still need a few more points. I will tell her how I sit on the deck thinking of her. I look at the night sky remembering all the wonderful times we have had together.

9/30/1945: Hurrah, mail has finally found us. And two of the letters were from my sweetheart. She said she was feeling ill and has gained weight. If she keeps that up, she will be a cubby little thing. More to love, I guess. Tomorrow, according to Lt. Baxter, Executive Officer Lt. Reddit will sign my promotion to GM2c. I worked hard for it so Norma would be proud of me. I can't wait to marry her.

I guess I spoke too soon about the typhoon missing us. I am told it is now headed towards us again after turning easterly. The wind is picking up and the bay water is getting rough. Better write some letters before it gets to rocky. My handwriting is bad enough without the weather making it worse. I hope her cold gets better.

10/01/1945: I was officially told of my change in rank and then I did something Norma might not understand. I signed a request to be retained in the Navy for another 120 days beyond my enlistment date. This should ensure I have the points for discharge and hopefully be closer to finding a way back to the states. Also, I am a Petty Officer GM2c now. This ought to make Norma proud and maybe overlook the extension I signed. Cliff showed me a way to fold my letters to Norma before I put them in the envelop. I learned to fold them so when she pulls the letter out, the first thing she sees is the heading, where I write my 'Hello Beautiful'. That should put a smile on her face before she even reads a line of my letter. This might help her thoughts before she sees my extension signing when I write next..

10/03/1945: Got another letter from my 'Sweets'. It made the day wonderful. I guess I should write and tell her about the extension I signed. This will mean I won't be out until January 1946. The gunnery chief, John Hayes, wanted me to stay around since they were short-handed in the ordnance group. Replacements are hard to find because everyone wants to go home.

As hot as it is aboard this ship, I still think about the times with my darling and I sitting in front of the fireplace. She is in my arms as I am telling her how beautiful she is to me. I feel like sending her a big old fifty.

10/05/1945: It has been another uneventful day of repairing ships and pulling them off the beach. Some are in so bad a shape, we pile them up together in one place for disposal later. I wrote Norma a letter this morning so I could send it when mail call arrived today. Knowing I have less than four months to being discharged, makes me think of us being together all the time.

At times, I struggle to find things to do since I am in ordnance. Still, I will do some painting on the guns so the Skipper knows I am doing something.

I just finished another letter to my 'Sweets' but the mail has already gone today. She will wonder about two letters with the same date arriving at different times. It is past 2200 hour and it is late. I did get a letter from her today. It is always a joy to read the latest one. She wrote about receiving the packages I mailed from Hawaii. Now when should I expect my grass skirt picture of her?

This afternoon we had a beach party on a small island about five miles from where we are anchored. Around thirty guys including me, were given permission to leave the ship. It took an hour to get to the island, leaving us only an hour or so. We needed to head back and be aboard by 1600 hours.

Somebody had already created a couple ball fields on the island. For refreshments, we were rationed 3 beers per man. We didn't bring the ball equipment, so mostly we went swimming. It was crystal clear water. It was nice to get away from the ship for a while. Maybe I'll not tell her about the beer. They were small bottles anyway.

10/08/1945: Today was a challenging and event-filled day on the deck. Going about the normal routine of salvaging small ships and repairing them, we had a serious incident. I was watching them use the large crane to haul the pontoon boat off the side of the ship and into the water. The pontoon is often used to allow the repair crew to bring their equipment closer to the work being needed. The pontoon was secured to the side of the ship to allow more deck space and since it is used so much, it was just hung on the side.

With the crane's cable attached to the pontoon for lowering into the water, the bindings securing the boat were cut loose. I think it was cut loose too quickly from what happened next. The pontoon's weight suddenly jerked the cable, the crane's boom buckled and everything just fell over the side.

The boom is now hanging dangerously from its cab, across the crushed railing and down into the water. The cable broke loose causing its block / tackle and the hook to drop to the bottom of the bay. Immediately the deck chief sent divers into the water to locate the cable gear. Unfortunately, no success in locating the gear.

It is now getting close to 2200 hour and I need to write letters. Norma continues to be more faithful in writing to me than I am in writing to her. I got three letters today from her. We are expecting another typhoon but predicting their path has not been very good as I saw from the last one. It is raining and windy outside right now, so maybe they've got this one correct. And who is this 'Margie' in her letter today. I don't remember anyone by that name as one of her friends.

10/10/1945: The typhoon did come through making a repeat of our ordnance group's trip ashore yesterday an impossibility. In fact, the winds and rough waters were so severe we dragged anchor all over the bay. Fortunately, we did not run into another ship. Of course, the last ship I was aboard being hit by another ship was the *SS Collis P. Huntington*. If it wasn't for that collision, I would not have met my future wife who now waits for me. There I go, thinking about being discharged so we can be together forever.

The wind and rain were so bad I couldn't see 50 feet. The storm dragged our ship up on the beach around 1500 hour yesterday. Before the storm, our smart Skipper took on ballast so we would sit lower in the water. After the storm passed, we discharged our ballast making us lighter and higher in the water so we could move off the beach at high tide. This is why Ensign Miller is the skipper and not any of us.

Still quite a few ships did not have smarts like our commander and are on the beach until someone helps rescue them. The Lord is definitely looking out for our ship. Maybe because we have a Chaplain like Fred.

It is late again and I need to write the folks and Norma. I wonder if these typhoons are reported back home in the newspaper. Maybe Norma could look for one and send me the article.

10/14/1945: Today was an experience. About six of us in the ordnance group and our officer, went ashore about 0900 hour. I missed going to services but I was glad I went with the group. We had an army truck for use in going around the island and the first thing we saw was a small town on the far end of the island. It only had six buildings still standing but they were still in bad shape. Every place you looked were piles of bricks that were once buildings before the war.

As we rode along the shoreline, I could see the calm ocean and smaller islands farther out on the horizon. It was lovely. Then we reached some tombs. They were carved into the hillside and they were everywhere along the hills. Some had cement fronts but others were open. I peeked into a couple of them. I saw earthen jars and the bones of body remains. I wondered if these deaths were from the war or from earlier times.

We reached a beach area and stopped for another look at the horizon. This view was towards the bay where we are anchored. The water was full of ships at a distance. I could almost imagine the site as ships with sails instead of powered with steam or fuel oil. The island had a balance of beauty and ugliness. We were back aboard by 1600 hour.

10/15/1945: Another Monday of early to rise and quick to salvage. Our salvaging is made more difficult because of the crane problem. Our boom is being repaired on another ship having the space and skill to fix it. Therefore, we have been leaving the pontoon in the water all the time and we have to drop equipment down the side to it.

I was given a new responsibility today. At various times, we man what are called "Special Sea Detail Stations". I was stationed on the stern and given a set of headphones to be worn the entire time I am manning the station. I was told to repeat all orders coming from the bridge to the deck officer and replies from the deck officer to the bridge.

I was there for six hours and we only broke for chow. My ears are still stinging from the headphones while I am writing this entry. It's like one of my brothers had punched me in the ears all day.

10/16/1945: While I am writing about today's activities in this journal, I realize I have not written any letters to my 'Sweets' or family for some time. I need to let them know the mail has gotten bad again. Our mail house onshore was blown away by the last typhoon. They say mail is going out but it just isn't coming in very well. Norma's last letter asked about my five-pound gain. I guess she didn't like my comment about how she might become a 'cubby little thing' on her weight gain.

Talking about weight, do I tell her my 'after movie routine'? Well, I need a snack after watching movies. Cliff and I have Ed get us some eggs and bread from the mess kitchen. We go quietly down to the armory where we have a three-unit electrical hot plate for percolating coffee during the day. So, after the movie, the three of us make some coffee and fry eggs on the burners. Then we make egg sandwiches with the bread. If Ed gets lucky, he will bring down ham or even cans of fruit he finds in the kitchen.

I sleep like a baby on a full stomach. I wonder how well my future wife cooks. I don't think she has ever cooked a meal when I ate at her folk's place.

10/18/1945: This morning at 0900 hour, Cliff and I were tasked with the important job of taking last night's movie ashore and exchange it for another one. We, along with several other guys going ashore, loaded into a small boat. We reached the dock on the main island and disembarked. Cliff said we were about fifteen miles from the place where we needed to exchange the film.

One of the other guys said follow us, it will be faster than walking or waiting for the island bus transport. So, we followed the group over to the highway about five blocks away and thumbed for a ride. The morning rain had made the walk a muddy mess, ankle-deep.

Reaching the highway, Cliff and I got a ride quickly in a jeep but it was only going half the way we needed to go. It wasn't long before we got another jeep ride to our destination, Brown's Beach. We traded in the film and got one labeled "**A Blonde from Brooklyn**". When I write Norma, I will tell her the film was a red-head from Brooklyn to tease her.

Going back was more challenging. The rain was off-on again the whole way back. It took three different jeep rides and one truck ride.

After reaching the dock, we found there was no boat to take us to our ship. About the 1330 hour we were able to catch a ride on the postman's boat going out to collect and drop off mail on the anchored ships. On reaching the *USS Okala*, I found I received 5 letters from my darling. The oldest one was dated August 24th.

The guys tease me about how I get so many letters. They say she must love me, then they laugh. I always reply about how I am going to marry my girl when I get out of the Navy. I looked through all the letter I got and did not see a picture of her in that grass skirt I sent. I don't want to nag but I do want the picture with the skirt. Maybe her family thinks that sort of picture is in poor taste. Well, I have a lot to write about tonight, so I better get started if I want to see that movie we brought aboard today. See *Editor's Movie Info at the end of this document*.

10/19/1945: The mail continues to be a concern. Today I received two of Norma's letters; one dated October 1st and the other September 17th. I did learn she had a great birthday party. Although, someone named 'Fagily' appeared to hurt my darling's feeling through something he did or say. I will for sure, tell 'Sweets' how I feel about the incident and I will handle it when I return home.

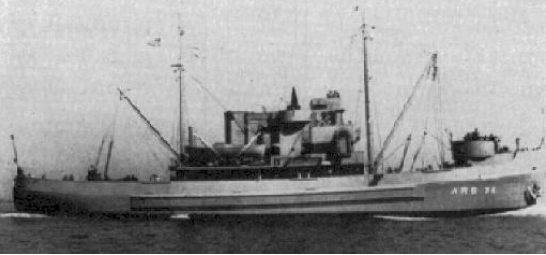
In other news, we had another beach party and I was the 'acting' shore patrol, gun included. We had to create our own ball field on the beach but it was a good game anyway. I laid my gun down so I could play ball. About halfway through the game, our executive officer, came along.

He did not say anything about my laying the gun down. Instead, he joined the game as an outfielder. He's one of the good officers we have onboard.



The salvage operations are progressing ahead of schedule. We have twice the men onboard today, nearly three hundred, compared to our normal complement of a hundred and sixty. These extra guys are from the ARSs doing most the actual close-up salvaging and repair work. They look like oversized tugboats. Our ship is mainly the supply ship for them providing equipment, parts and steel.

Editor's Note: Rescue and salvage ships (hull classification symbol ARS) are a type of military salvage tug. They are tasked with coming to the aid of stricken vessels. Their general mission capabilities include combat salvage, lifting, towing, retraction of grounded vessels, off-ship firefighting, and manned diving operations



Weight-class salvage ship USS Swivel (ARS-36).



Anchor-class rescue and salvage ship USS Restorer (ARS-17)

It's getting late, so I need to write some letters. I still miss her very much. Her letter says she went for a walk and could smell the wood fires from someone's fireplace. Oh, how I wish I was on that walk with her right now. I did read that someone gave her a baby rattle at her birthday party. When I read it, I laughed. She needs to keep it, for after we are married it may come in handy. Now how many kids did we agree on having?

10/20/1945: The weather here in Okinawa is very changeable. Mostly it is hot during the day and cooler at night which helps sleeping. Today was rain, rain and rain all day. So, I worked below deck scrubbing the armory for a Captain's Inspection. We received the highest score of 4.0 as usual. The rain did let up so we could have a movie on deck. It was "**Knute Rockne**", the football coach at Norte Dame.

I will try to write Norma. Oh, how I miss her more and more now that I am close to being discharged. But then four months will drag by like an anchor on the sea floor. I wish she were here for a big number fifty kiss.

10/21/1945: It was a dreary Sunday but Fred did a good sermon and the mail came, making it a wonderful day. Marie sent a letter and Norma sent three. What more could I want than letters from the two great girls in my life. Norma wrote she is having a wonderful time but misses me. I guess she is happy about my short time left in the Navy and the war being over.

Although we are far apart, I think of her always. I think often about her being right by my side wherever I go or do. Her letter says she does not know how to swim. If she will show me how to skate along with her, I will teach her how to swim. She will need lots of patience to teach me to skate. I need to stop writing in the journal and write to both my girls because it is late. I have the morning watch.

10/22/1945: The weather is very cool now and I need a jacket when I stand watch at night. Not much happening but the routine of assisting the ARSs in their salvaging of ships along the shoreline. Otherwise I just sit and think about my future wife and the great times we have had together. I must be patient, for my discharge will come and I will then be with her forever.

10/24/1945: I guess the ordnance group did not appear busy enough. The skipper has us painting the mounts and decking about the guns again. We started with the bow gun and another seaman is helping me. Hopefully, after two days of painting, we will finish the gun tomorrow. Maybe we can take it easy in the afternoon. On Friday, we will start on the aft gun and plan to be finished by Saturday evening if the weather holds out.

I was told my way home might possibly come the first of the year. That would be when my 120-day extension would be up. I got two more of Norma's letters and she sounds in good spirits. She also wants to know my coming home date. If I tell 'Sweets' it might be January, she might get disappointed if it changes but if I don't tell her, she will be worrying about 'when' I will be home. If I am home in January, it will be perfect wood-burning fire time.

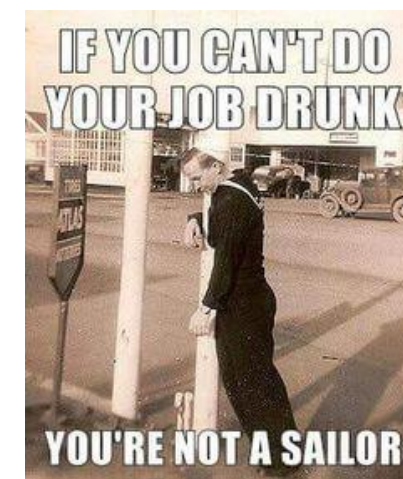
10/26/1945: My future wife just keeps those letters coming. I got one yesterday and one today. She sent the newspaper clipping on typhoons I had asked her to find, a couple weeks ago. Most of the article is true about ships on the reefs and the beach. Many are still there but we are working to get them floating. I do disagree about how many men were lost in these storms.

We did not get much done on the aft gun painting because we had to have a beach party.

The ball game was wild. After five innings, we were leading eleven to seven with the game going nice and smooth. Then they began to run up the score. Guess they were holding back just to pound us into the ground. After tying it up at twelve, everyone began to get serious. The play improved and the scoring stopped. In the last two innings, they pounded out eleven more runs. It was fun playing ball together, even if my side lost. I enjoyed being ashore.

Norma's letter had a sailor joke in it making us look bad. The question was 'What is a sailor?' and the comeback was "Sailors are Wolves in Ship's clothing!" Maybe we deserve the reputation but I send 'all my love to her only'. This is the way I close all my letters to her. She wrote about her raking leaves. I wonder if she remembered when I sat on the swing and watched her cut grass. I was enjoying the view.

I still get my heart racing when I read the "Hi Sailor" at the top of all her letters. She even did it on one of her swimsuit pictures and that really got it into high gear. Of course, I get a lump in my throat when I think of how much I miss having her in my arms. Sometimes that lump takes days to go away. I wonder if she has heard the song by Perry Como called "Till the end of time. It's funny when she says she will definitely keep the baby rattle safe, like I had asked. *See Song lyrics / more Sailor jokes in Editor's Movie Info at the end of this document.*



10/27/1945: I did very little on the aft gun painting because the patrol boat crew came by and asked to play a ballgame with us. I guess they saw how bad we played yesterday. I left the ship to begin the game at 1300 hour and we did play badly. It was over by 1500 hour. We played like old women. Or 'terrible' is a more fitting word for it. It was six to nothing in their favor. If we stay here in Okinawa, they want to play us again.

I got two more "Hi Sailor" letters today. She says she is alright but worried about my being in typhoons. I need to write her about the typhoon not being much different than a storm at sea. Our ship is a good one and the Lord will guide us through it.

I get very anxious about wanting to have her close and in my arms. Three months to go and it still seems like a long time. Just creeps by like a cloud. Slow but steady onward to the goal.

10/28/1945: And the letters keep coming. Got another one from Norma. I need to bundle some of these old letters up and send them to Marie for safekeeping. I have so many and I don't want to lose them if I begin to start on a trip back home. I might be jumping from one ship to another as I make the trip.

I spent this morning missing services because I was talking to Kowalski, the pharmacist mate, for an hour. Then I went to the armory and talked with the rest of the guys about women. I would have done better going to services.

After chow, I was back in the armory talking about just everything. I mentioned I needed to go ashore and get some clothes at the Naval Supply Depot or NSD. Perry suggested I take an officer with me if I could. He said if I gave the officer a sad story about losing clothes during the typhoon, I could get the clothes for free. Perry said Walter got his that way and to ask about it when I saw him later. He said, Walter liked going ashore because he would give out some of his toy animal carvings to the kids he would see.

I left the armory about 1600 hour because I was hungry. Ed was there, so we both sat drinking coffee and eating some cookies he had just baked. If I tell 'Sweets' about this, she will know where those extra pounds are coming from. After my snack, I then needed a short nap. I woke at 1730 hour just in time to eat chow.

I better write a short letter to my future wife after this entry because I have to get up at 0330 hour for my 0400 to 0800 watch. Glad I had that nap.

11/01/1945: I am glad we finally got all the guns painted. They look good. Now they want us to paint the decks. And after the decks, they want us to go around scrapping rust off the ship wherever we see it. It is a never-ending effort to maintain this ship in proper condition. Maybe it is just busy work for us, since there is nothing to shoot at with the war over. I did get to the NSD for some clothing, but I did not get any of it free. I did get some of the local military money used on Okinawa to send back home.



I do think of my future wife often. Looking at her pictures always reminds me of some of the swell times we had together on my visits. The pictures do bring her close to me. Last night, I was dreaming of caressing her soft hair until someone called out my name and spoiled it. I always seem to run out of words to tell her of my deep love. I keep hearing that Como song in my ear, I will love her "till the End of Time". It helps.

11/03/1945: The sun was shining today. It was a nice warm day, not the sweaty hot like it usually is here. Cliff and I cleaned the up the gun deck on the stern this morning. Then, we went to the forward gun deck to finish painting there for a Captain's inspection this afternoon. The captain gave Cliff and I a complement on our painting job of the gun decks. Ensign Miller is a good commander of the ship and treats everyone fairly.

The mail situation seems to be mixed-up again. It's been almost a week since I got a letter.

Speaking of mail, it has been a week since I wrote Marie and the family. I need to let them know, I am still alive and happy. Of course, I will write to my future wife, too.

11/06/1945: The deck painting had really made all my muscles ache. I have failed to write letters home lately. But I need that relaxing time in the armory talking with the guys and drinking my coffee. Time seems to go by so quickly. We are really like a bunch of old maids at some tea party, gossiping about everything.

I need to write those letters. Today, I got two letters from 'Sweets'. Just think, eighty-four more days and I should be discharged out of the Navy. The date January 28th is what I have marked as my last day here and I can start for home. Oh, I need to tell her to have a happy Thanksgiving. It is only three weeks away, I think. Just one more cup of coffee and I will find a corner here in the armory to write those letters.

11/11/1945: It's Sunday and they have declared it a 'Holiday Routine Day'. But I did have to participate when we tied up along a tanker to take on fuel. Reminded me of my time on the *SS Mobilgas*. Today, I was the stern communicator during the fueling. I wear a set of headphones and keep the bridge informed on what is happening in my area. If they drop the stern anchor, I will tell them if we are trending port or starboard; how many fathoms of cable is out; or if they are lifting the anchor, when it has cleared the water.

It took from 1300 to 1630 hour for fueling. By almost 1900 hour we were back at our anchorage in the bay. Let's see, how long has it been since I wrote letters. I spend so much time thinking about Norma, I forget to put it down on paper.

11/15/1945: The skipper informed everyone about our movement to Tokyo in the next week or two. I learned it would take three or four days to reach Japan. I was hoping for going to the west coast of America but at least it is a change from Okinawa.

Every day is a day closer to my being with my love. I miss her so much and look forward to being with her forever after.

11/16/1945: I am very thankful my future wife keeps writing. It made the painting we did in the armory more cheerful for me. The colors are different than one would expect on a Navy Ship. All the doors we painted a deep sky blue as well as two cabinets. The deck of the room was painted a dark red. A canvass runner across the deck is already a dyed blue. We painted the walls pure bright white. Our version of the flag's red, white and blue.

It's Friday evening. The moon is so bright you can move around the deck in the dark of night. The air is cool and the moon just shines across the water. I saw a boat pass by on the port side. The waves, made by the boat, just sparkled like stars. It reminds how my darling's eyes would shine in the moonlight. I need to write her and send a number fifty.

I did get a letter from Marie about Florence Schunk passing away on Halloween. At least, now she is free of suffering. I need to send my sympathy to my brother Frank and his wife Norma, Florence's sister. Florence's son, Thomas, must be twelve or thirteen by now. I guess he will stay living with his grandparents, the Shueys. Just think, when I marry my darling, there will be two Norma Boettchers.

11/18/1945: Another Sunday and Fred did a good sermon. After services and chow, some of us went to the armory. A few guys made comments about our new color scheme. We all talked about what we wanted to do once we get to Japan. Some of the fellows we talked to here at Okinawa, had already been to Japan. They say the Yokosuka Naval Base wasn't much of a place. But it was only forty miles from Tokyo if you wanted to visit.

As everyone drank coffee and talked about Japan, I was counting down the days until I would be home. I was thinking of her soft lovely hair and her sweet happy mannerisms. My goal is home not Japan. Unless I can get a ride back to the states from there.

11/19/1945: I know I wrote a letter to Norma yesterday but I think of her all the time. Also I need to write today because I have news of importance to tell her. I was informed today, I will be transferred ashore on February 1st and then transferred to the states. That would be the date of my 120 days expiring but ruins my hope to see my love around the first of the year. Where they will put me ashore is unknown. I understood they can't hold me beyond Feb 1st unless I re-enlist in the regular Navy for four years. I think my darling would not approve of such a move.

Still the scuttlebutt continues about what Japan is like when we visit. Some of the guys heard about the geisha girls. They say the girls are not too bad looking. My interest in getting home as soon as possible. I will be teasing Norma if I indicated an interest if any of the girls were redheaded. Of course, no redhead has what my girl has. And she has it "till the end of time".

11/21/1945: I don't know when we are actually leaving out of Okinawa for Japan but we are all busy getting ready to move out. The ordnance group is working to have our guns in shape for target practice. We will be shooting at targets when we are at sea, going to Japan. The plan is to have Thanksgiving tomorrow instead of the 29th since we may be at sea.

One of our crew guys painted a large mermaid on the front of the bridge. Everyone enjoys the new mascot and it helps morale. I wonder if I should tell Norma. The mermaid is in her birthday suit. But I am impressed how she is wearing a sailor's hat and that makes it okay. Go Navy!

Since I do have something to write about and I am always thinking of her, I will just write her a short letter. Also, her letter arriving today, said Gloria was ill. I hope it is not serious and she gets well soon. But I must hurry because I have the 2000-hour watch in about twenty minutes. I do like the stamps she is now using. Very patriotic.

11/22/1945: What a miserable day I have had. The weather is cool during the day. At night it gets chilly. I woke this morning with a headache. It still hurts even now as I am writing. I did cover the guns since it rained some and it was cloudy all day. I laid down after chow. When I saw it was 1530 hour, I just rolled over and slept some more.

At 1700 hour, I got up to wash for supper. If I can keep my headache under control, I will write a short letter to my sweetheart. Time is going fast but not fast enough. I want her in my arms yesterday.

11/24/1945: The weather is nice but I am not enjoying it. For the past two days I have been feeling bad. Today, I decided to see the doctor and he said my temperature was sub-normal. He gave me some pills and told me to rest as much as possible. I slept from 1300 to 1600 hours. I feel much better now.

The scuttlebutt is we are leaving for Japan tomorrow just after services and lunch. We are going in a convoy, so the speed will be slow to maybe seven knots. It may take five days to get there.

I need to write a reply to the latest letter from Norma, I got today. Otherwise I won't be able to send one until we get to Japan. No matter when they finally transfer me off the ship and discharge me, every day is a day closer to going home. And our Thanksgiving meal did not happen as planned.

11/25/1945: We are finally and truly out to sea. We left Okinawa for Japan at 1400 hour. It feels good to be moving on the open water again. We are not shooting at targets today so I have done very little. I will write a short letter to 'Sweets' which I hope to send from Japan.

11/26/1945: Today, we are completely out at sea and on the outside of the convoy group so we could practice target shooting. All guns were fired and the guns my group operated, destroyed three of the six balloon targets. Of course, anytime a gun is fired, it needs to be cleaned. I can't say cleaning was the fun part of the day. But the practice was over.

The afternoon was different. I thought it was a drill when we were called to battle stations. It was not. A mine was sighted in the water and we were instructed to destroy it. My group fired at it and was able to sink it after a few rounds. The mine did not blow up. And again, this meant cleaning the gun. Not the fun part of the day.

Still I think of my future wife. As we travel to Japan, I am moving farther away from her but only in miles. My thoughts are always of her and how we will someday soon be together forever. Sometimes, I get blue thinking how long it will take to get back to her.

11/30/1945: After five days, I am now seeing Japan from the ship's railing. It is not pretty. The docks and piers are a heap of junk. There is floating rubbish all around the harbor. It is a mess here at Yokosuka Naval Base. What I can see is just plain filthy with a capital F.

But we did have a Thanksgiving meal aboard ship yesterday. It was just like home with all the side dishes like sweet potatoes and corn. I was able to get one of the menus to send to Norma and it has Ed Byrne's address on it for after the war. Seems like everyone wanted to get a menu as a memento of the great meal.

I will write 'Short and Sweet' and hope her meal was as good as mine. When I think of my darling, I have a lot to be thankful for in my life. My future wife has made changes in me for the better. I will always work to make her love deserving of me. A lot has happened in my life over the past four years.

12/01/1945: Today is Saturday and I am in Yokosuka, Japan. The weather here is cooler than in Okinawa and definitely colder at night. I had the 0800 to 1200 watch this morning. I was not wearing my shorts due to the coolness.

We are losing some crew people, communications and an executive officer, who are leaving for the states. I wish I was one of them. Our gunnery officer has moved up to be one of the executive officers.

12/02/1945: Today, I was on the list for the first liberty party going ashore to Japan. We boarded at 0800 hour on an LSM being used for transport into Yokosuka or Tokyo. They were used for landing supplies during the initial invasion after the surrender. We were underway by 0900 and arrived ashore at 1000 hour. As I went across the bay, I could see the snow on top of Mount Fuji.



*USS LSM-119 Beached at
Wakayama, Japan
for occupation duty
beginning September 1945.*

The city of Yokosuka is very dirty and heavily bombed out. The people appear very poor with clothes well worn out. Their appearance seemed unclean maybe due to a lack of clean water for washing. Very few stores are open. The prices are very high because there is not much being available for sale.

But then everyone seems to have plenty of money to spend for what little there is to buy. Cigarettes are 20 yen for a pack. At 15 yen to a dollar, a pack would cost me \$1.20 US. In the ship's store it would be only 20 cents at most. The 'sen' is smaller and takes ten to make one yen. These are the same values used in Okinawa. I did get an actual 10-yen Japanese bill here in Yokosuka.



Seeing Yokosuka was interesting but my thoughts continued to be of home with my love. Maybe eight weeks, at most, before I see her. Seems like an eternity right now but I guess it is going fast, just not fast enough.

12/04/1945: It has been a quiet Tuesday on ship. Other guys are going ashore in groups. I am going to send the Japanese money and the Military money from Okinawa to Norma so she can see what it looks like. I am also going to put my stamp upside down and see if she notices. I talked to Gacek in the armory this afternoon about his liberty party experience going ashore yesterday.

I asked Chester how it went. He said he didn't know the Japanese soldiers were allowed to keep wearing their uniforms. He was glad he was with three others from the ship when they passed by two Japanese soldiers walking on the street going the other direction. We all kind of stared at each other as we passed by one another. Just after they passed the group, Chester said one of them said something in Japanese. So, Chester turned and made a motion like he was going to chase after them. They ran for a short distance away from him but stopped when it appeared Chester wasn't going to really chase them. One Japanese guy stopped and spit in his direction. Otherwise, Chester says most Japanese people they met were very quiet and kindly.

12/05/1945: Still I just stayed around the ship and the naval base. I only did the one liberty into the city. The base has converted one of the Japanese warehouses on site into several basketball courts. So, some buddies and I went over there and played for an hour or two. After dinner, Cliff and I tossed the ball around because it was such a nice day. I have almost nothing to do with the ship operations being a part of the ordnance group, so I just lay around waiting for my time in the Navy to be up.

I will write my darling to keep up her hope of my return. I have learned the transportation back to the states is very good here. Some ships can reach the states in less than three weeks. All I need to remember is to let her know when I leave out of Japan. I wonder if I can send a telegram from here.

12/06/1945: Tomorrow is Friday, December 7th. It will be four years since the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor and brought us into this war. Now, here I sit on the *USS Okala* at the shores of a defeated Japan. What an experience these four years have been for me.

But most of all, I met my true love and future wife due to a collision at sea. Then my unplanned Christmas visit home where I had lunch with a couple of SS Kresges girls. Every time I think of her, I write her another letter, boring to her, I am sure.

Today, I will write how I played basketball and got my little finger knocked out of joint. Not once but twice in less than an hour. I now have it in a tiny splint. It makes writing in the journal very difficult. I am sure it will be the same difficulty when writing letters for a while.

I got three letters from darling and I need to respond. I think the sudden mail pickup is because they finally are sending it to Japan instead of Okinawa.

If I was sent home today, I still would not be home by Christmas. Another one without her in my arms by a warm fire. But it will be the last one. Those wedding bells will ring for us.

12/08/1945: Today is Saturday, the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor of four years ago. Yesterday, everyone seemed to dwell on how much has changed in the world since that day of infamy, including me.

This morning began differently. I was on the list for the liberty party going to Tokyo. I again boarded the LSM at 0830 hour. The ride was smooth but chilly, arriving at 1045 hour in the capital city. I was surprised by what I saw. Many modern looking buildings. At least, newer than what I remember seeing in Cincinnati. Most of the buildings here were closed due to war damage and lack of materials to repair them.

We were allowed to walk around the grounds of the Imperial Palace. The gardens were not blooming but it still looked great. Other than sightseeing, there is not much to do around here.

Tokyo was as filthy as Yokosuka. I did have time to have my face drawn on a handkerchief. It will make a nice Christmas gift for Norma if I can get it sent right away.



12/09/1945: Same Sunday schedule of eat, church service, eat, play basketball, nap, eat and write to my beautiful sweetheart. I will send the handkerchief in the next mail call.

12/10/1945: I ate early since I had the 0800-to-1200-hour watch. After lunch, I played basketball for two hours. Then to round out my rough day, I watched the movie “**Weekend at the Waldorf**”. See Editor’s Movie Info at the end of this document.

12/11/1945: Another lazy day. I am glad I have my wife-to-be, as the focus of much of my thoughts. I can’t think of anything better than that to do.

12/14/1945: The past few days the skipper has had us cleaning guns every morning. I guess we were not looking busy enough around the ship. He would be right in that opinion. He still allowed us to play basketball in the afternoon. I guess the skipper felt we needed the practice before playing the **USS New Jersey** officers. And we did.

Last night, the officers from the **Battleship New Jersey**, beat the **USS Okala** crew by a score of 34 to 22. Unfortunately, their advantage was to foul us very often. Our coxswain, Ford, was the referee but he must have gone almost blind to have missed their fouling. Maybe I was thinking about my beautiful one and not being fully in the game, myself.

I did get good news from Marie. Her letter says both Bill and Charlie are back in the states. By now I am sure they have been discharged and are sitting home eating home cooked meals. It has been over two years since I have seen either of them. I will write Norma and let her know the news and send my Holiday wishes. Oh, how I wish I could give my Christmas wishes in person.

12/16/1945: I have gotten two Jap rifles with the help of Ben, our wonderful quartermaster. He can get you almost anything. Except, I have to build my own box to put them in for shipping them back home. Lumber is scare around here. It took me two days to convince Walter to let me have what I needed. Tomorrow, I will need to have it inspected before I nail on the lid and print in big letters, my home address. Then, I will pray it gets to Marie for safekeeping until I get home.

This evening, I walked around the deck, imagining ‘Sweets’ was with me. We were holding each other’s arm as we did. The air was cool but nice walking weather. Again, I thought of my time with her on her swing. The time we carried the swing around to the front of the house so she could see the moon better. I was looking, not at the moon but into her eyes. I was ashamed of my thoughts at the time, but again, she was “beautiful”.

While I am thinking of her, I will stop here and write her a love letter. My future wife is wonderful and I am the luckiest sailor in the Navy.

I have decided there is not much reason for going on liberty into the city. I will play basketball in the warehouse and watch movies on the ship. This will keep me out of trouble and not give anyone a reason to delay my return to the states.

Also, I got a letter from my darling today. I will read and reread it until I fall asleep.

12/18/1945: I ate breakfast late this morning as I did the midnight to 0400 watch. I did get another letter from 'Sweets' yesterday. I need to tell her when I write this evening, that she will be getting a lazy guy. Just not much to do but lay around here. I know this will be the last holiday I will spend without her in my arms, enjoying a nice warm fire. Christmas is a week away.

I have still not learned of when, I might get sent back to the states.

Her last letter says her friend 'Buddie' had gotten home from the war. I will inform her, to tell him, he must be a gentleman when he is in her company. I am sure he is, otherwise he would not be a friend of hers.

I must be the last one to get home from the service and it might be five more weeks before I do. I better start on her letter before they run me out of the mess hall. In about thirty minutes, they will have their daily inspection.

I have to thank Cliff for a Japanese Christmas card showing a mountain village with snow on the ground. It says in English, "A Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year".

I wonder where Cliff got a box of them to share. I will write something nice on it and put it in my letter to Norma.



A Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year

Dearest Darling
I hope that this card finds
you in the very best of health
and happiness.

I want you to know that
as each day goes by my love
for you grows stronger. I wish
I could express my love for
you, but there are no words
to be found any where, that
would say, what I truly mean.

By my God Bless you always.

all my love
to you only
Raymond

12/20/1945: Another cool lazy day of eating and playing basketball. Some of us still gather in the armory to talk about the future. Mostly about when each of us would be going home. Everyone was excited to hear the points needed to be discharged out of the Navy have again been reduced. The number is now only 50 points. I only have about 47, I think, but my out will be based on my 120-day extension expires.

12/23/1945: The weather is cool and we expect a rain storm coming into Yokosuka. Today, there was no mail for me. As I begin to think more about going home,

I realize today is the fifth anniversary of mother passing away. I guess I am the only one missing when they get together with Pop to tell stories about her. Till and Marie will always prepare a good meal when the family comes together. They are both cooks in a cafeteria.

I continue to think of my love. I wonder what her Christmas is going to be like. I hope she gets things she wants. Maybe something for the cedar chest.

12/27/1945: The weather began to clear. The day started like any other with not much to do but for a plan to play more basketball. At mid-afternoon a battered aircraft carrier docked alongside us. It was the **USS Kalinin Bay** damaged by a gale force storm hitting it on Christmas as it was coming to Japan from Hawaii.

I got the list of damages from Bill Root: the storm buckled approximately 50 feet of the flight deck along the port side, forward; badly damaged the port catwalk and lookout platform; tore holes in the forecastle deck 18–30 inches long; ripped off seven life rafts and nets; buckled in the decks of all four forward ready service rooms; and sprung the catapult track out of line. It is unbelievable what a storm can do.

12/29/1945: As a salvage and repair tender, the **USS Okala** was perfect to help in the ship's repair. First thing I helped in doing was the removal of the port catwalk and lookout platform with Perry Taylor. It took us most of the day. I saw our guys welding the holes in the forecastle and others cutting away buckled decking. It seemed they would cut plating from one part of the ship only to weld it down somewhere else.

I did learn from Lt. Baxter of my orders to be transferred onto the **USS Kalinin Bay** immediately as of today, had been processed. I was told Ensign Miller signed the paperwork today and the ship would be my transport home when we get her seaworthy. Now I am motivated. Tomorrow, first thing, I will move my gear onto the **USS Kalinin Bay** as my new home away from home. Most of the bunks were on the hanger deck area.



Kalinin Bay (CVE-68) 1943–1946

12/31/1945: Lt. Baxter sent over a note to me about having acceptable marks on my semi-annual evaluation at my GM2c rating I obtained October 1st. I'm glad this, but my thoughts are getting this ship seaworthy so it will take me home.

1/02/1946: There were many of those working on the **Kalinin's** repair motivated the same as I because they are transporting home as well. I forgot all about my 24th birthday. I forgot about celebrating New Year's and I forgot about writing to anyone.

I just worked doing whatever I could to help get the **USS Kalinin Bay** ready to sail and to get me home. I almost forgot to write in this journal.

1/03/1946: Today we left Yokosuka for San Diego, a trip of about two weeks. My orders were to continue from San Diego to Toledo, Ohio for separation out. Chester had told me yesterday before I left out, the **USS Okala** was departing as well and heading to Guam. The skipper told them they would be hauling about half a dozen Japanese officers to Guam for trial. Chester said he has enough points to get out when they reached Guam. He hoped he could find a way to the states from there.

1/10/1946: Not much to write because there is not much happening. Everyone is excited about heading home and tell of the plans they have made. For me, I plan to make those wedding bells ring and marry the girl of my dreams for the past three years. The question I am asking myself is do I surprise her by showing up at her house or send her a telegram when I reach San Diego or what? Maybe I should telephone her when I get stateside.

I still will have a week or so going from California to Toledo and then discharged before getting back to Cincinnati. The chow on the ship is not very good but no one seems to care. We are all going home for the rest of our lives. It's a very happy ship at the moment. I have not sent a letter to Norma, my love, since before Christmas. She is likely already worrying about why there are no letters from me. I guess I need to make that a call when I hit San Diego.

1/18/1946: The **USS Kalinin Bay** arrives in San Diego California. The ship unloads her cargo of happy men including me. I am back in the good old USA. I need to find transport to the train station for the ride to Toledo. I think I will wait to tell Norma I'm back. I have a surprise plan for her. I gave Clyde a letter I wrote to Norma but dated January 31, 1946. Clyde is staying in California for his discharge processing. He will mail it for me on February 1st. He is another great guy among many on the **USS Okala**.

I wrote about arriving in San Diego and on my way to Toledo for discharge processing. I expect to be back in Cincinnati on Saturday, February 16th. I said I will see her then, my future wife-to-be-very-soon. All true but highly misleading like most things out of a sailor's mouth! But for a good reason.

*Editor's Note: The ship, still needing repairs found no available space at the Naval Dry Docks in San Pedro. After sitting at anchor for six days, the orders from Naval Service Force, Pacific Fleet, made her available for post-war disposition. **USS Kalinin Bay** was decommissioned on 15 May 1946.*

1/23/1946: I have arrived at the separation center in Toledo today after traveling by train for several days and train changes. There is a line. I was told it will take a few days to process me. They said to get room at the YMCA and they will pay for it when I am fully processed out.

1/26/1946: It took three days to process me out. There was a lot of paperwork. I learned I am being Honorably Discharged. That's good. I was given the serial number C2209332. I was given a Honorable Service Lapel pin, Discharge Button, Discharge Emblems and I was recommended for a second Good Conduct Medal (*Editor: see 10/22/1942*).

I am permitted to wear my naval uniform not to exceed 3 months after separation. Also, I must report to the local Selective Service Board in Cincinnati within 10 days of today. My time in the Navy showed 4 years 3 months and 14 days of service. I will be sent medals to include an Asia-Pacific Victory Medal; American Area Medal; American Defense Medal; European-African-Middle Eastern Medal and my Good Conduct Medals.



1/31/1946: I am hiding out at the YMCA, hoping I don't run into anyone I know. Tomorrow, Clyde will mail the letter I gave him. I will check-in at the Selective Service Board to find out what other rules apply to me as a discharged military person. I hope I can stay hidden for two weeks, so my planned surprise will work.

Editor's note here the journal stops! The last event comes from family!

Ray had avoided being noticed for two weeks. Ray thought he would walk over to Vine Street, then down towards Fountain Square. It was cold and snow on the ground, making the walk more difficult. Ray was trying to remember when last he had to walk in snow. Saw some falling on his ship but not having to walk much in it. The traffic was very crowded and he had to stop at every corner. Ray was on a schedule and did not want to be late.

Upon reaching Fountain Square, Ray found a cart vendor selling flowers, The Calla Lilies were very expensive because they were out-of-season and these were greenhouse grown. Ray bought fourteen. Ray continued down Vine a short distance, turning right on Fifth Street. He had called Norma's friend, Rita Bergen, last night to be sure Norma was working today. Ray pleaded with Rita not to say a word to Norma about him being in town.

When Ray arrived at SS Kresges, Rita saw him immediately. She told Ray; his secret was safe. She told Ray about Norma's job was now on the top floor counting all the receipts and cash for the store. As it was getting close to lunch time, Ray headed for the stairs to go up to the top floor. Ray was followed by a group of women working in the store. Rita may not have told Norma but she seemed to have told everyone else.

Upon reaching the top floor, Ray walked quietly up behind Norma, who was deep into counting dollar bills. With a dozen women watching from the stairs, Ray quietly asked,

"Do any red-heads work on this floor?" Norma turned around, smiled the biggest smile ever and planted a big old number "FIFTY-ONE" on Ray.

It was Valentine's Day. It was the third anniversary of Ray's first letter to Norma, now his "Short and Sweet" wife-to-be!

4/13/1946: Married! And lived happily ever-after for 63 years. Ray passed away in July of 2009 at 88 years old. Norma passed away in October of 2012, four weeks after her 93rd birthday.



Notice the Calla Lilies?



*Honor Service
Lapel pin*



Discharge Button



Discharge Emblem



Good Conduct Medal



Asia-Pacific Victory Medal



American Area Medal



American Defense Medal



*European-African-Middle
Eastern Medal*

*World War II Victory Medal
(Awarded later and sent to Ray)*

Editor's Notes, Misc.

Editor's Note, see 6/28/1942, Degaussing: The Navy and merchant ships faced a new and dangerous weapon in World War II regarding the use of the magnetic mine. Fortunately, an effective means of defense had been developed even before our entry into the war.

The magnetic attraction of a ship passing in the vicinity pulls the needle until it touches the contact and completes an electric circuit which detonates the mine. **Degaussing coils** set up magnetic fields which prevent a change in the vertical magnetic field large enough to cause the sensitive needle to complete this electrical circuit. The installation of degaussing coils thus leaves the ship relatively free from the danger of explosion from such mines except in very shallow water.

Editor's Note, see 7/17/1942 for intro: The light, free-swinging 20mm machine gun, which the Navy adopted in November 1940, was a product of the Oerlikon Machine Tool Works in Switzerland, although our guns were all manufactured in the United States. As automatic weapons go, it was unbelievably simple and almost trouble-free. At a cyclic rate of 480 rounds per minute (rpm), and using a spring-loaded drum of 60 rounds, the machine gun kept firing as long as the firing lever was held back or until something broke. And amazingly, there were only five parts that could break; four of these were located together on the breechblock. Almost all the breakages occurred in the four-part face piece, the sear, the hammer, or the striker assembly.

When the gun stopped firing with the breech closed, the gunner's mate instantly recognized the cause, removed the block, and replaced one or more of the four parts. The only other thing that could possibly break was the barrel spring, and this problem was easy to diagnose because the broken parts jammed against the side plates, holding the breech open and preventing return to battery.

Another advantage of the air-cooled Oerlikon was that a man with asbestos gloves could change barrels in about 30 seconds. The relative disadvantages of the 20mm were its short range and limited destructive power of its small explosive shell.

Editor's Note, see 11/03/1943: The Service Dress Blue (SDB) uniform consists of a dark navy-blue suit coat and trousers that are nearly black in color, a white shirt, and a black four-in-hand necktie for men. The material is generally wool or a wool blend, depending on the vendor. The men's jacket is double-breasted with six gold-colored buttons. Rank insignia are gold sleeve stripes for commissioned officers, while rating badges and service stripes are worn on the left sleeve by chief petty officers (CPOs). The prescribed headgear is a white combination cap, although a navy-blue garrison cap is optional in some situations when the jacket is not worn, unless stated otherwise by the prescribing authority.

Junior enlisted sailors

Service Dress Blues for male junior enlisted sailors are based on the classic sailor suit in navy blue, referred to as "crackerjacks" because of the sailor-suited figure that adorns the packaging of Cracker Jack snacks. They consist of a navy-blue wool pullover jumper with a tar-flap collar adorned with three rows of white stripes on the collar and cuffs and two white stars, one at each corner of the collar. A black silk or synthetic fiber neckerchief, rolled diagonally, is worn around the neck, under the collar, with the ends tied in a square knot in the center of the chest. The trousers for the uniform are flared as "bell bottoms". The trousers have traditionally featured a broad-fall opening, rendering the buttons unseen. A traditional white "Dixie cup" hat is also worn, as well as black leather shoes.

Ribbons are worn with these uniforms over the top left pocket opening, along with qualification or warfare insignia.

Either the all-weather coat or peacoat may be worn with this uniform in cold or inclement weather. The color of the enlisted rate insignia and service stripes for the Service Dress Blues is either red or gold based upon how many years the wearer has served (contingent on disciplinary history); the colors on the Service Dress Whites are always black.

6/10/1944: This is the ship bombed while sitting next to the SS Thomas Scott. Both were waiting at Utah Beach to unload men, vehicles and gasoline.

Following is the injury report from the bomber attack on the SS Charles Morgan. They had already discharged their cargo of troops and equipment.

COMPANY
MORNING REPORT

ENDING 10 June 2400 1944

STATION La Mesnille, Prov of Normandy, F

ORGANIZATION 304th Port Co., 519th Port B

SERIAL NUMBER	NAME	GRA
36672108	Ridgeway, Lionel L.	Pvt
32941540	Barone, Francesco NMI	Pvt
35434671	Curry, James E.	Pvt
36866141	Slasinski, Walter M.	Pvt
Above 4 EM fr dy to kd in action. 0415.		
36824355	Phelan, Ralph F.	Tec
58532935	Trantham, Dwayne E.	Pvt
56879307	Hankins, Raymond D.	Pfc
Above 3 EM fr dy to USS PC 484, wounded in action. 0415.		
56825406	Ballenger, Robert J.	Pfc
56874776	Karowski, Albert J.	Pfc
Above 2 EM fr dy to USS PC 484, injured in action. 0415.		
32615172	Kraus, Sidney H.	Pvt
34428165	McCullough, William V.	Tec
Above 2 EM asgd and jd fr Cas Det 5 10th RD, APO 874, as of 2 June 44.		
Kraus: MCO 344, MOS 271. McCullou MCO 499, MOS 474.		
OFFICER	FLD O'RCAPT	1ST LT 2D LT WO

COMPANY
MORNING REPORT

ENDING 10 June 2400 1944

STATION La Mesnille, Prov of Normandy, F

ORGANIZATION 304th Port Co., 519th Port B

SERIAL NUMBER	NAME	GRA
01592715	Winfree, John C.	2nd
Injured in action. 0415. Laceration contusion of right leg. Due to bombing of ship.		

June 10th 1944
Morning Report Figures:
Killed in action:
Pvt. Lionel L. Ridgeway*
Pvt. Francesco Barone
Pvt. James E. Curry
Pvt. Walter M. Slasinski

Wounded in action:
T/4 Ralph F Phelan
Pvt. Dwayne E. Trantham
Pfc. Raymond D. Hankins

Injured in action:
Pfc. Robert J. Ballenger
Pfc. Albert J. Karowski
2nd Lt. John C. Winfree

June 10th figures
found on a later record:
Missing in action:
Pvt. Richard E. Heon of Rhode Island
Pvt. Frank Rodriguez of New York
Pvt. George J. Swinehart, Jr. of Mich.

“Rear echelon work shared some of the same dangers faced by the front-line troops. On June 10, 1944 German bombers struck the *SS Charles Morgan*. There is no surviving record for casualties in the other companies, or if any beside the 304th were serving on the ship. Dave Weaver requested copies of the 304th’s Company Morning reports before they were destroyed in the National Archives’ 1973 fire (see image above). Bruce Kramlich provided me with a document stating that a Pvt. Richard E. Heon went MIA on this day. I wonder if he ever turned up. Also listed as MIA is Pvt. Frank Rodriguez. This was a friend of Irving Sugarman, one of the vets I talk to. He was sad to say Rodriguez was killed.

There were seven 304th Port Co. men killed and six men injured on June 10th, 1944, presumably from the same ship bombing.

All casualties to the 519th Port Bn. occurring during the war took place in the first week of landing at Normandy. A total of 10 men were killed and 12 were wounded. The 519th Historical Report states, that all of these were due to aerial bombing. However, a couple of veterans told me that at least one man was killed by a booby trap while souvenir hunting.” From Book “Longshore Soldiers” by Andrew J. Brozyna

Meritorious Service Medals Awarded
“for Conduct or Service of a Meritorious Nature”
during World War II

Merchant Marine Meritorious Service Medal

Adams, William
Master, SS Charles Morgan 06/10/44
Captain William Adams, was master of the *SS Charles Morgan*. The ship had delivered her cargo to a European port, reloaded nearly 500 Army personnel and several hundred tons of equipment for the Normandy beachhead. After discharging this equipment and debarking nearly all soldiers in the initial invasion, the vessel was struck in No. 5 hatch by a bomb, causing her to settle by the stern in about 33 feet of water. Fires were started and several men killed. Getting all fires under control, Captain Adams searched all quarters for possibly trapped and injured men and left the ship only after she was declared a derelict by the U.S. Navy salvage officer. At low tide he and eleven of his crew volunteered to reboard the ship in spite of continued enemy action. Pumps were manned to keep

the engine room dry and make possible the salvaging of valuable stores and equipment Sep. 22, 1945.

In April the son of the first mate aboard the ship told me that the German planes was allowed to get so close, because there was an order for all ships to hold their fire unless the plane could be clearly identified. In the first few days following the invasion jittery gunners in Normandy had shot down several Allied aircraft by mistake. Since the attack came at night identification was extremely difficult. First Mate Curtin received the Silver Star for his heroic efforts on the sinking ship.

Editor’s Movie Information, Misc.

First Movie Ray saw at Camp Bradford, 11/19/1944:

The Human Comedy is a 1943 American comedy-drama film.

The film is the story of a teenaged Homer Macauley in high school, working part-time as a telegram delivery boy, during World War II. The effects of the war on the "Home Front" over a year in Homer's life are depicted.



Second Movie Ray saw at Camp Bradford, 11/19/1944:

Strange Affair is a 1944 mystery film.

A mystery writer and his wife investigate a murder at a charity benefit.



12/07/1944, Camp Bradford: *Why We Fight* is a series of seven documentary films produced by the US Department of War from 1942 to 1945, during World War II. The films were originally written for American soldiers to help them understand why the United States was involved in the war, but US President Franklin Roosevelt ordered it to be distributed also for public viewing. Most of the films were directed by Frank Capra.

Why We Fight was primarily edited by William Hornbeck although some parts of it were re-enacted "under War Department supervision" if no relevant footage was available. The animated portions of the films were produced by the Disney studios, and the animated maps followed a convention of depicting Axis-occupied territory in black.



1. *Prelude to War* (1942; 51min 35s) (*Academy Award for Documentary Feature*) examines the difference between democratic and fascist states and covers the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia.
2. *The Nazis Strike* (1943, 40min 20s) covers geopolitics of the conquest of Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland.
3. *Divide and Conquer* (1943, 56min) – about the campaign in Benelux and the Fall of France.
4. *The Battle of Britain* (1943, 51min 30s) depicts Britain's victory against the Luftwaffe.
5. *The Battle of Russia* (1943, 76min 7s) Part I and Part II shows a history of Russia's defense and battle against Germany.
6. *The Battle of China* (1944, 62min 16s) shows Japanese aggression such as the Nanking Massacre and Chinese efforts such as the construction of the Burma Road and the Battle of Changsha.
7. *War Comes to America* (1945, 64min 20s) shows how the pattern of the Axis powers' aggression turned the American people against isolationism. This last film of the series was, and still is, one of the most graphic visual histories of the United States ever made."

2/10/1945: *When Irish Eyes Are Smiling* is a 1944 United States musical film.

It chronicles the life of popular Irish song composer Ernest R. Ball.

The film was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Original Score in 1944.



3/03/1945: Abbott & Costello in “Here comes the Co-eds”

Slats plants a phony article in the local newspaper that declares Molly's ambition is to attend Bixby College.

The dean of Bixby (Donald Cook) reads the article and offers her a scholarship.

She agrees, but only if Oliver and Slats can accompany her. They are hired as caretakers.



3/11/1945: “A Tree Grows in Brooklyn.”



The film depicts several months in the life of the Nolans, an Irish American family living in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn in 1912.

Francie is worried that the building's landlord has cut too many branches off the tree in the tenement's courtyard, which Francie and her father call the Tree of Heaven.

Life begins to get complicated with the father's death, new baby and more.

4/10/1945” *One Romantic Night* is a 1930 American romantic comedy film.

Princess Alexandra's tutor who falls in love with her.

Alas, affairs of state demand that Alexandra marry Prince Albert, whom she does not love despite his graciousness and affability.



6/06/1945: **The Army-Navy Screen Magazine** was a bi-weekly short film series which was shown to American military personnel around the world during World War II.



It included a newsreel and a cartoon of **Private Snafu**. A total of fifty issues were produced until early 1946 by the Army Signal Corps.

The **Private Snafu** series was designated classified and were produced by Leon Schlesinger Productions, Warner Bros. Cartoons, UPA, MGM, and Harman-Ising Studio.

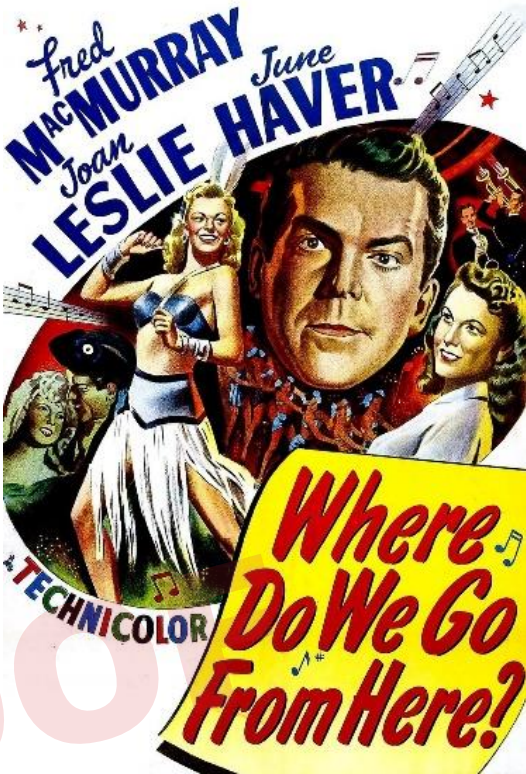
6/09/1945: *Where Do We Go from Here*, is a romantic musical comedy-fantasy film.

Bill Morgan, a young American who is eager to join the military and fight for his country during World War II, but his 4F status prevents him from enlisting.

Bill does his bit for the war effort by collecting scrap metal. Among the discarded junk he discovers a mysterious brass bottle which he rubs to clean off the grime.

Suddenly, Ali, a Genie, appears and offers to grant him three wishes.

If Bill was only more specific in what he wished to have!



6/12/1945: “A Medal for Benny”

Benny joined the army after one too many scrapes with the law, and only Charley and Benny's fiancée, Lolita Sierra (Dorothy Lamour), have anything good to say about the boy.

When they receive word, that Benny is to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor, the opportunistic townspeople pretend that the Martins are cherished, eminent citizens.



6/13/1945: *Nob Hill* is a 1945 Technicolor film about a Barbary Coast saloon keeper. Part musical and part drama.



Sally Templeton sings at Tony Angelo's popular turn-of-the-century nightclub in San Francisco, which is called the Gold Coast.

She is also in love with Tony. One day, a young girl, Katie Flanagan, just off the boat from Ireland, arrives looking for her uncle.

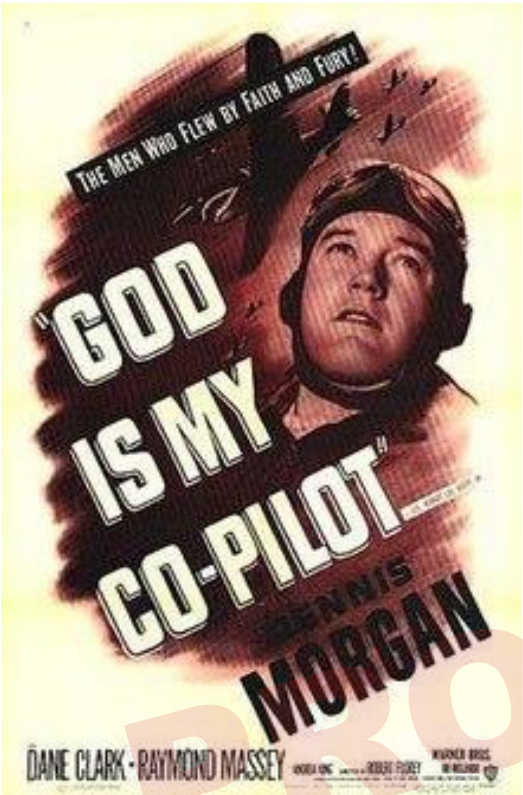
Informed that he has died, Katie is about to be sent back by Tony on the next ship until Sally persuades him to let the girl stay a while.

7/01/1945: *Brother Rat* is a 1938 American comedy drama film about cadets at Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, Virginia.



At the Virginia Military Institute, are three good-natured troublemakers who are trying to clean up their act in the weeks leading up to graduation. Still, try as they might, they cannot seem to stop breaking the rules. When the secretly married Edwards learns his wife is pregnant, his preoccupation leads to events that send everything out of order.

7/12/1945: *God is My Co-Pilot* is a 1945 American black-and-white biographical war film.



Based on the 1943 autobiography of the same name by Robert Lee Scott Jr. (April 12, 1908 – February 27, 2006).

It recounts Scott's service with the Flying Tigers and the United States Army Air Forces in China and Burma during World War II.

7/13/1945: *The Story of Dr. Wassell* is a 1944 American World War II film set in the Dutch East Indies.



The book and film were inspired by the wartime activities of U.S. Navy Doctor Corydon M. Wassell which were referred to by President Roosevelt in a radio broadcast made in April 1942.

7/17/1945: *Tonight and Every Night* is a 1945 American musical film.

The film portrays wartime romance and tragedy in a London musical show, loosely modelled on the Windmill Theatre in Soho, determined not to miss a single performance during the Blitz.

An American showgirl falls in love with an RAF pilot.



1945 INVASION OF IWO JIMA NEWSREEL U.S. MARINE CORPS 72352D

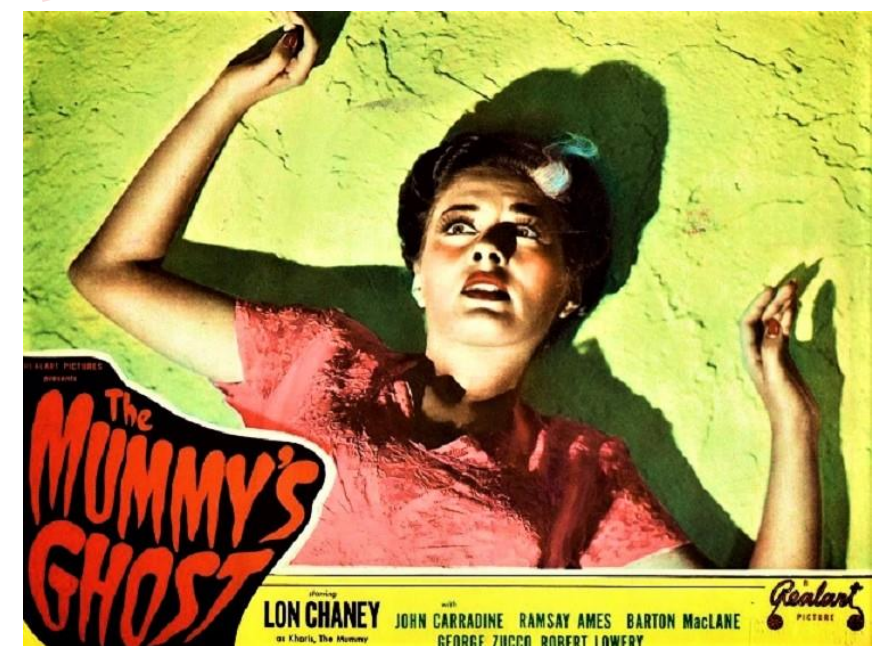
This issue of Official Films' "News Thrills" covers the U.S. Marine Corps' invasion of Iwo Jima. The Battle of Iwo Jima (19 February – 26 March 1945) was a major battle in which the United States Armed Forces landed and eventually captured the island of Iwo Jima from the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II. For more information visit <http://www.PeriscopeFilm.com>

9/02/1945: *The Mummy's Ghost* is a 1944 American Universal Studios horror film.

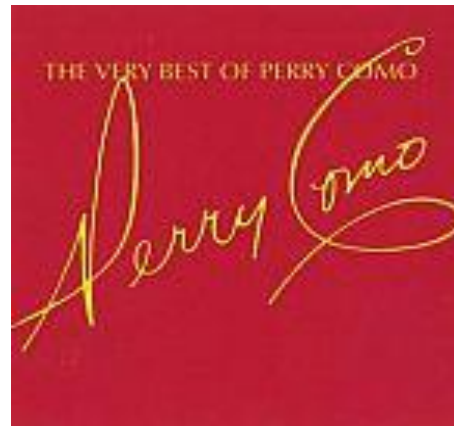
This film is the sequel to *The Mummy's Tomb* (1942). The story was continued in the 1944 sequel *The Mummy's Curse*.

Andoheb, the aging High Priest of Arkam, has summoned Yousef Bey to the Temple of Arkam to pass on the duties of High Priest.

Yousef Bey pledges his devotion before Andoheb explains that during each full moon, Yousef Bey is to brew the fluid from nine tana leaves.



9/05/1945: 'Till the End of Time'



Album: The Very Best Of Perry Como (1945)

Recorded at Lottos Club, New York City on July 3, 1945, this ballad topped the US charts for ten weeks and was the best-selling jazz record of 1945. It was also Perry Como's first million seller.

Till the end of time, long as stars
are in the blue
Long as there's a Spring of birds
to sing I'll go on loving you
Till the end of time, long as roses
bloom in May
My love for you will grow deeper
with every passing day

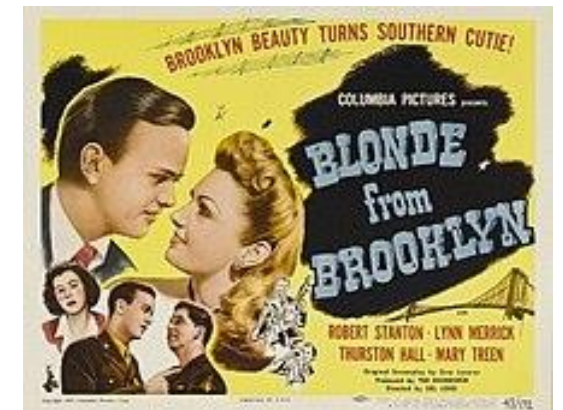
Till the wells run dry and each
mountain disappears
I'll be there for you to care for
you through laughter and through
tears
So take my heart in sweet
surrender and tenderly say that
I'm
The one you love and live for till
the end of time

Till the wells run dry and each
mountain disappears
I'll be there for you to care for
you through laughter and through
tears
So take my heart in sweet
surrender and tenderly say that
I'm
The one you love and live for till
the end of time

Writer/s: BUDDY KAYE,
TED MOSSMAN
Publisher: Sony/ATV Music Publishing
LLC, Warner Chappell Music, Inc.
Lyrics licensed and provided by LyricFind

10/18/1945: *Blonde from Brooklyn* is a 1945 American musical comedy film released by Columbia Pictures on June 21, 1945

A crooner is looking for a gig singing on the radio for a sponsor named "Plantation Coffee." Considering the name of the company, he figures playing a "southerner" will get him the job. He ropes a singer into the idea with him (since he'd accidentally helped her lose her job as a jukebox girl.



10/20/1945: "*Knute Rockne, All American*" is a 1940 American biographical film which tells the story of Knute Rockne, Notre Dame football coach.

Lars Knutson Rockne, a carriage builder, moves his family from Norway in 1892, settling in Chicago.

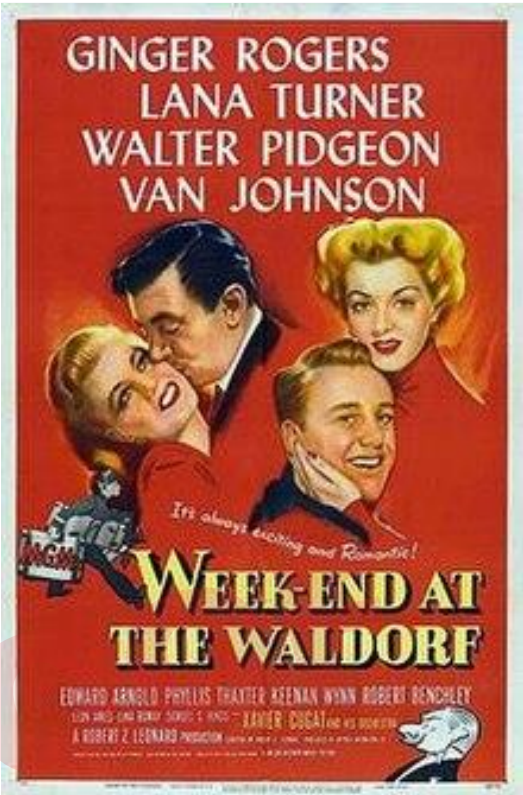
His son, Knute, saves up his money and enrolls in college at the Notre Dame campus in South Bend, Indiana, where he plays football.

Rockne and teammate Gus Dorais star in Notre Dame's historic 35-13 upset over Army at West Point in 1913."



12/11/1945: Week-End at the Waldorf, an American comedy drama film. It premiered in Los Angeles on 17 October 1945.

The film focuses on guests staying at New York City's famed Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. Among them are lonely screen star, in town with her maid for a childhood friend's wedding and the premiere of her latest movie; war correspondent, mistaken for a jewel thief; a flyer Captain, wounded in World War II and facing perilous surgery in three days; a wealthy shyster, who is trying to sign the Bey of Aribajan to a shady oil deal; a cub reporter for Collier's Weekly hoping to expose the shyster; and a bride-to-be whose upcoming wedding is endangered by her belief her fiancé is in love with someone at the hotel.



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